

# **Demi-Gods and Semi-Devils 3: Breaching the Formation**

**Jin Yong**

# The Demi Gods and Semi Devils

天龍八部

***TIAN LONG BA BU***

## Book 3: Breaching the Formation



Original novel written by Jin Yong  
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## Chapter 21 : Thousands of Li were Hazy Like a Dream

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The two of them immediately went southward, bypassed Yanmen Pass via the mountain ridge and came to a small town. They went to an inn. Without waiting for Qiao Feng to say anything, A'Zhu told the waiter of the inn to bring them twenty jin (0.6 kg) of wine. Seeing that the two of them did not look like a married couple or siblings, the waiter already felt surprised, hearing her tell him to take out twenty jin of wine, he was even more astonished, hence he only looked at them in a trance without going to fetch wine and also without replying. Qiao Feng gave him a stare; he was not angry yet his look was commanding. That waiter was frightened. Only now did he turn around while mumbling: 'twenty jin of wine? Use wine to bathe?'

A'Zhu laughed and said: 'Great Master Qiao, we're going to find Elder Xu but it looks like in two days we'll be detected by other people. There'd be lots of fun if we fought and killed all the way but I'm afraid Elder Xu would flee at the mere sight of us coming towards him. Then, we wouldn't be able to find him.'

'Ha-ha,' Qiao Feng laughed and said: 'You don't need to flatter me, if we fought all the way, there'd be more and more enemies coming, and eventually the two of us wouldn't be able to avoid getting killed...' A'Zhu said: 'There're unlikely to be dangers. It's just that if every one of them flees at the sight of us, it may be hard to handle.' Qiao Feng said: 'Then according to you, is there any way for us? How about resting in the inns during daytime and going quickly at nighttime?'

A'Zhu smiled and said: 'If you wanna make it impossible for them to recognize us, it couldn't be easier. But I don't know if Great Hero Qiao who is famous all over the land under heaven is willing to disguise?' Speaking to the last, it was the word 'disguise' yet again.

Qiao Feng laughed and said: 'I'm not a Han so basically I don't wanna wear these Han clothes already. But if putting on Khitan clothes, it'll be very hard to travel in Central Plains. A'Zhu, who do you think should I disguise as?'

A'Zhu said: 'You're imposing in stature, as soon as we stop or go out you'll make everyone take notice. It'd be best if you disguise as an ordinary-looking man in jianghu who doesn't have any unusual characteristic. It's possible to run across several hundreds of men of this type on roads every day, so no one would keep their eye on you.'

Qiao Feng slapped his leg and said: 'Brilliant! Brilliant! After drinking wine we're gonna disguise.'

When he drank up twenty jin of wine, A'Zhu immediately started to disguise. A great variety of things such as flour, paste and ink glue were combined and the extraordinary features of Qiao Feng's face disappeared one by one. Next, A'Zhu gave him a sparse mustache on the upper lip. When looking in a mirror, even Qiao Feng could not recognize himself. After that, A'Zhu disguised herself as a middle-aged man.

A'Zhu laughed and said: 'Your appearance has been changed completely, but as soon as you talk or drink wine, other people would know who you are.' Qiao Feng nodded and said: 'Um, then I must talk less and drink less wine.'

Going south this time, he really talked very little, he also drank only two or three jin of wine each meal as a formality.

That day, arriving in Sanjia town in Jinnan, while the two of them were eating noodles in a small noodle shop, they suddenly heard two beggars talking to each other on the outside. One beggar said: 'Elder Xu died a really miserable death. All the bones in his chest and his back were broken.'

That evil traitor Qiao Feng must've committed murder again.' Qiao Feng was slightly shocked and thought: 'Elder Xu has died?' He and A'Zhu looked at each other.

He heard another beggar say: 'The day after tomorrow the session for receiving condolence will start in Weihui, Henan. All the Elders and brothers of the Society will go to the memorial ceremony. We must discuss a way to capture Qiao Feng.' The first beggar then said a few slangy sentences of the Society. Qiao Feng certainly understood what he meant. The beggar said that Qiao Feng had a formidable influence hence they were not allowed to talk as they pleased and to be overheard by his subordinates.

After eating noodles, Qiao Feng and A'Zhu left Sanjia town and went to the outskirts. Qiao Feng said: 'We should go to Weihui to have a look. Maybe we'll see a clue.' A'Zhu said: 'Yes, we must go to Weihui. Great Master Qiao, most of the people who'll go the memorial ceremony are your former subordinates, so don't give yourself away in your words and behaviors.' Qiao Feng nodded: 'I know.' They immediately turned to the east and went towards Weihui.

On the third day, they arrived in Weihui and entered the city. They only saw that there were full of the Beggar Society's disciples on the streets and alleys. Some occupied tables in restaurants and ate with no manners, some slaughtered dogs and pigs in alleys and some even importuned and expropriated on streets. Qiao Feng felt unhappy when he saw that the Beggar Society which was known as the number one large society in jianghu was slack in rules and no longer had the strict and thriving atmosphere of the days when he had been in charge of it; if this situation continued, soon it would be regarded with contempt by the common people. Even though he and the Beggar Society were no longer friends and had become the enemies of each other, seeing that his painstaking efforts in many years had been nullified in a very short time, he still felt sorry for it.

Hearing several disciples of the Beggar Society say some slangy sentences, he knew that the memorial tablet of Elder Xu was placed in an abandoned garden in the west of the city. Qiao Feng and A'Zhu bought some incense sticks, candles, joss money, a pig head, a bull head and a goat head then went to the abandoned garden along with other people and kowtowed to Elder Xu's memorial tablet.

He saw that Elder Xu's memorial tablet was imbued with fresh blood. That was a custom of the Beggar Society which meant that the deceased had been killed by someone and the members of the society had to avenge him. All the people in the mourning hall inveighed against Qiao Feng, but they did not know that he was beside them. Seeing that all around him were the leading people of the society, Qiao Feng feared that his flaws would be noticed by someone. Not wanting to stay here for long, he immediately took leave and walked out alongside A'Zhu. He thought: 'Elder Xu's already dead. The number of people who know that leading big brother in the world has been reduced by one.'

Suddenly he caught a glimpse of a person at the end of the alley, who was a woman with a tall and big stature. With his sharp eyes, Qiao Feng recognized her as Granny Tan. He thought: 'Very good, she must've come here to attend Elder Xu's memorial ceremony. I've wanted to find her.' After that, he saw another person flash by the alley. This person also had a very good lightness skill, but he was Zhao Qiansun.

Qiao Feng was surprised: 'These two people are sneaky. Is there anything strange?' He knew that these two people had originally been shixiongmei (apprentice brother and apprentice younger sister) of each other and the emotional entanglement between them had not been broken off until now. He thought: 'Both of them are sixty or seventy years old already. Could it be that they're still secretly dating and having an affair?' At first he did not like to meddle in other people's business, but he thought that Zhao Qiansun knew who the 'leading big brother' was and that Grandpa Tan and

Granny Tan were also likely to know him, if he could find some chinks in their armors, he would be able to seize the opportunity and force them to reveal the truth. Hence he immediately put his mouth close to A'Zhu's ear and said: 'You wait for me in the inn.' A'Zhu nodded. Without delay, Qiao Feng chased in the direction that Zhao Qiansun had gone.

Zhao Qiansun only chose secluded places to go along, sometimes hiding in the corners of walls on the eastern side and sometimes shrinking under the edges of roofs on the western side. With a stealthy behavior, he went out of the Eastern gate of the city. Qiao Feng followed Zhao Qiansun from a distance and all along did not let him detect himself. He saw that Zhao Qiansun went to the side of a canal, bent his body and got into a big wooden boat. Qiao Feng raised his internal energy and ran very quickly. After leaping several times, he already reached the side of the boat. He gently jumped onto the roof of the boat and put his ear against it to listen.

In the cabin, Granny Tan let out a deep sigh and said: 'Shige (elder apprentice bro), you and I are already this old. It's too late to regret the things of our young years. What's the point in mentioning past events again?' Zhao Qiansun said: 'This life of mine has been ruined. It's already too late to regret. Xiao Juan, I've arranged to meet up with you here for no other reason than to beg you to sing those several songs of the past once again.' Granny Tan said: 'Alas, you're always silly to the point of being laughable. When my hubby came to Weihui and saw you again, he was already very displeased. He's a suspicious man so you'd better trouble me less.' Zhao Qiansun said: 'What are you afraid of? Us shixiongmei are on the up and up. What's wrong with talking about past events?' Granny Tan sighed and softly said: 'Those songs of the past, those songs of the past...'

Seeing that her mind had been stirred, Zhao Qiansun pleaded more: 'Xiao Juan, today the two of us have met but I



don't know when we'll meet again. I'm afraid my life is not long, when you want to sing to me again I won't have the blessing of coming to hear you.' Granny Tan said: 'Shige, don't say that. If you definitely want to hear me, then I'm gonna gently sing a song.' Zhao Qiansun said happily: 'Good, many thanks, Xiao Juan, thank you very much.'

Granny Tan leisurely sang: 'At that time, when you went over on the bridge, I was washing clothes next to it...'

When she had just sung two sentences, with 'ka-la' sounds, the door of the cabin was pushed open and a man rushed in. After Qiao Feng had been disguised, both Zhao Qiansun and Granny Tan were not able to recognize him. The two of them jumped out of their skin at first, but when they saw that he was not Grandpa Tan, they immediately calmed down and shouted: 'Who?'

Qiao Feng coldly looked at the two of them and said: 'One is frivolous and immoral, seducing a married woman; the other is slutty and shameless, secretly meeting the boyfriend without the husband's knowledge...'

When he had not yet finished saying, Granny Tan and Zhao Qiansun split up and attacked simultaneously from the left and right sides. Qiao Feng slightly leaned to one side, turned his hand over and grabbed Granny Tan's wrist. After that, he struck out with his elbow, aiming at Zhao Qiansun's left side. His attack was delivered later but came earlier than Zhao Qiansun's. As experts in wulin, both Zhao Qiansun and Granny Tan only thought that in one stance they would be able to subdue the enemy and never could they have expected that this mediocre-looking man had such extraordinary martial arts that he could go on the offensive from a defensive position in just one stance. The space in the cabin was narrow hence their limbs could not be used to the fullest, but Qiao Feng was good at both long-range and close-quarters combats, in the cabin which was less than one zhang square, he still executed grasping hand techniques and short-range skills very cleverly. Fighting to

the seventh bout, Zhao Qiansun was hit by a finger attack in the waist. Scared, Granny Tan fought a bit more slowly. She was instantly hit by a palm attack in the back and collapsed on the floor.

Qiao Feng coldly said: 'The two of you please have a rest here. In the abandoned garden in Weihui city, not just a few heroes and brave men are paying respects to Elder Xu's memorial tablet, I'll invite them to come here to comment on this matter.'

Zhao Qiansun and Granny Tan were frightened and tried to channel their internal energies, but their acupuncture points were already blocked, and they were unable to move even the tips of their little fingers. The two of them were already old, they no longer had any sexual desire, they arranged to meet each other here only to talk about the past, and there was nothing unethical between them. But that time was in the Northern Song Dynasty, everyone was very serious about protecting the rules of etiquette, and if any hero or brave man in jianghu violated a taboo about sex, they would be despised by the many. When there were one man and one woman quietly meeting up in this boat, who was willing to believe that it was only to sing a song and to talk some silly sentences? If everyone came here to see, afterward how would the two of them be able to live? Even Grandpa Tan would no longer have any honor and glory.

Granny Tan hastily said: 'Hero, we haven't done anything that offended you, if you could show some mercy, I... I'll definitely repay your kindness.' Qiao Feng said: 'There's no need to repay me. I only ask you one sentence, please answer in three words. If you say the truth, I'll immediately unblock your acupuncture points and leave, and I'll never mention the incident of today to anyone else.' Granny Tan said: 'As long as I know, I'll certainly inform you.'

Qiao Feng said: 'Someone wrote a letter to Chief Wang of the Beggar Society, talking about the Qiao Feng matter.'

Many people call the writer of the letter 'leading big brother', who's this man?'

Granny Tan hesitated. When she had not yet replied, Zhao Qiansun shouted loudly: 'Xiao Juan, you mustn't tell. No matter what, you mustn't say.' Glaring at him, Qiao Feng asked: 'You'd rather lose all your reputation than say it?' Zhao Qiansun said: 'Then Laozi (your father here - arrogantly calling oneself) would die, that's all. I'm indebted to this leading big brother so Laozi definitely won't say his name.' Qiao Feng said: 'Then if Xiao Juan loses all her reputation, you won't care either?' Zhao Qiansun said: 'If Grandpa Tan knows about today's incident, I'll immediately kill myself in front of him and use death to express my regret, that's all.'

Qiao Feng turned towards Granny Tan and said: 'You may not necessarily be indebted to that man. If you talk, everyone will be safe and sound, you'll save Grandpa Tan's and your reputations, and you'll save your shige's life as well.'

Hearing him threaten to take Zhao Qiansun's life Granny Tan could not help but shiver and said: 'Ok, I'm gonna tell you. That man is...'

Zhao Qiansun hurriedly called out: 'Xiao Juan, you mustn't tell. I beg you, beg you. This man is proly Qiao Feng's subordinate, if you say, that leading big brother's life is gonna be in danger.'

Qiao Feng said: 'I'm Qiao Feng. If you two don't tell, there'll be endless future problems.'

Frightened, Zhao Qiansun said: 'No wonder your martial arts are so good. Xiao Juan, in my life I've never begged anything from you. This is the only thing I beg from you, you must agree, no matter what.'

Granny Tan thought that for the past several decades he had been cherishing her, had very deep feelings for her, she herself had let him down many times, and he had never said what he had wanted to beg from her, but this time, in order

to cover up for the person who he was indebted to, he was willing to die, hence she herself simply could not ruin his righteous act. She then said: 'Chief Qiao, today's matter, doing good deeds or doing evil with it is totally up to you. I and my shixiong have a clear conscience which can be expressed to Heaven and the Sun. Please forgive me for not being able to tell you what you want to know.' Even though she said these sentences politely, her words showed her determination not to reveal the truth at any cost.

Zhao Qiansun happily said: 'Xiao Juan, thank you very much. Thank you very much.'

Qiao Feng knew that it was useless to force them again. He uttered a 'humph' sound, pulled out a jade hairpin from Granny Tan's head then jumped out of the cabin, returned straight to Weihui city and asked about the place where Grandpa Tan was staying at. Because he was in disguise, no one was able to recognize him. Grandpa Tan and Granny Tan were staying at Rugui inn in Weihui city. This was not a secret matter therefore he knew about it immediately after asking.

When he entered the inn, he saw Grandpa Tan putting his hands together at his back and walking back and forth in his room, looking very fretful. Qiao Feng stretched out his hand and right at the middle of his palm was that jade hairpin of Granny Tan's.

After seeing that Zhao Qiansun had followed them very closely to Weihui, Grandpa Tan had always felt depressed and worried, and now, because he had not seen his wife for half a day, he was worried about her and was wondering where she had gone to. Suddenly seeing his wife's jade hairpin, he was both surprised and happy, and asked: 'Who are you? Did my wife ask you to come here? What do you want to instruct me?' As he finished saying he held out his hand and took that jade hairpin. Qiao Feng let him take the hairpin then said: 'Your honorable wife has been captured by other people. She is about to be put in danger.' Grandpa Tan

was frightened and said: 'My wife's martial arts are very good. How could she be captured easily by other people?' Qiao Feng said: 'It's Qiao Feng.'

As Grandpa Tan heard the three words 'It's Qiao Feng', he was no longer doubtful about this, but he was even more anxious and worried and hastily asked: 'Qiao Feng, alas! If it's him then this's really troublesome. My... my wife, where's she?' Qiao Feng said: 'If you want to see your honorable wife alive, it's very easy, if you want to see her dead, it's also easy.' Grandpa Tan was a stable man, even though he was worried, he still maintained his composure and asked: 'Please instruct me.'

Qiao Feng said: 'Qiao Feng has one matter to ask Grandpa Tan, if you say the truth, he will immediately let your honorable wife go and won't dare to harm a single hair of hers. But if you don't tell, he'll have no choice but to put her to death and bury her corpse and Zhao Qiansun's corpse in the same grave.'

Hearing the last sentence, Grandpa Tan could no longer restrain himself. He then let out a furious shout and sent a palm attack towards Qiao Feng's face. Qiao Feng slanted his body and slightly moved backward, that palm attack hit the air. Grandpa Tan was frightened, thinking that this palm attack of his had been fast like lightning and had not been something trivial but surprisingly this man had dodged it so easily as if nothing had happened. Immediately he stretched his right palm out obliquely and struck out horizontally with his left palm. Qiao Feng saw that the inside of the room was narrow which made it impossible for him to dodge therefore he immediately held up his right arm to receive the attack. With a 'pai' sound, the palm attack hit his arm. Qiao Feng's body did not shake. He turned his right arm over and pressed down onto Grandpa Tan's shoulder.

In an instant, Grandpa Tan felt as if there was a rock which weighed several thousand Jin put on his shoulder. He immediately channeled his internal energy in order to stand

upright but the weight on his shoulder was like that of a mountain or a mound, pressing him down to the point that his backbone produced ka-ka-ka sounds nonstop and were almost broken, hence he had no choice but to bend his knees and kneel down. Not willing to yield, he exerted himself and made another effort to stand up, but he was unable to take another breath, his knees became weak and he knelt down. He really could not help kneeling down like this, but his knees and joints had already become weak, thus when pressed down by such heavy force, it was impossible for him not to bend his knees.

Qiao Feng intended to defeat Grandpa Tan's pride hence after he had knelt down the pressure still did not decrease, making Grandpa Tan's back bend like a bow and his forehead almost touch the floor. The whole face of Grandpa Tan had become very red and he could barely sustain the pressure. He used all his strength to resist and hold his body up. Suddenly Qiao Feng's arm let go of him. The pressure on the shoulder of Grandpa Tan suddenly disappeared which was unanticipated by him hence it was too late for him to take back his strength. As a result, he immediately jumped up for over one zhang. With a 'peng' sound, the top of his head hit a beam heavily and all but broke it.

When Grandpa Tan was falling down from mid-air, Qiao Feng did not wait until his feet touch the floor to stretch out his own right hand and grab his chest. Qiao Feng's arm was very long while Grandpa Tan was short and small in stature hence no matter how he punched or kicked, he was unable to touch Qiao Feng's body. Moreover, when his feet were in mid-air, even if his martial arts were much better, he would not be able to use them. As soon as Grandpa Tan was in that urgent situation, he understood and shouted: 'So you're Qiao Feng!'

Qiao Feng said: 'Of course it's me!'

Grandpa Tan said furiously: 'You... You... Fvck you! Why do you wanna get that brat Zhao Qiansun involved in this?'

What Grandpa Tan was angry about the most was Qiao Feng's words that after killing Granny Tan he would bury her corpse and Zhao Qiansun's in the same grave.

Qiao Feng said: 'Your wife wants to drag him in. Why does it have anything to do with me? Do you wanna know where Granny Tan is now? Do you wanna know who she is saying loving words and singing love songs to?' Hearing that, Grandpa Tan immediately guessed that his wife and Zhao Qiansun were staying together and could not help but want to go see the whole story. He then said: 'Where's she? Please take me there.' Qiao Feng laughed coldly and said: 'What have you done for me? Why do I gotta take you there?'

Recalling what Qiao Feng had said previously, Grandpa Tan asked: 'You said you wanna ask me something. What do you wanna ask?'

Qiao Feng said: 'That day in the apricot forest outside Wuxi city, Elder Xu brought along a letter which was written to the former Chief of the Beggar Society Wang Jiantong. Who wrote this letter?'

Grandpa Tan's limbs slightly trembled. At this moment, he was still being lifted up by Qiao Feng and his body was in the air. If Qiao Feng sent internal energy out from the palm, he would take his life instantly. But unexpectedly he did not fear and said sternly: 'This man killed your father so you bear a huge grudge against him. I definitely can't reveal his name. Otherwise you'd find and take your revenge on him, and then wouldn't it mean I've caused him to get killed?' Qiao Feng said: 'If you don't say, you'll get killed first.' Grandpa Tan laughed ha-ha and said: 'What kind of man do you think I am? How could I be mortally afraid of death and sell off my friends?' Seeing him take care to preserve personal loyalty, Qiao Feng rather admired him. Had this been a different matter, he would have already stopped questioning him. But how could the grudge involving the deaths of his parents be something ordinary? Therefore he said: 'You don't care about your own life, but do you not

cherish even your wife's life? Grandpa Tan and Granny Tan's reputation going through the floor, leaving behind a world-scale disgrace, don't tell me that you ain't afraid of it either?'

People in wulin cherished reputation the most and it was usual for brave men in jianghu to attach more importance to their names than to their lives. After hearing these two sentences, Grandpa Tan said: 'I, Tan, sit firmly and stand upright, all my life I've never done anything wrong to my friends, how could you say the words 'reputation going through the floor, leaving behind a world-scale disgrace' to me?'

Qiao Feng sternly said: 'Granny Tan may not sit firmly and stand upright and Zhao Qiansun may do wrong to his friends.'

In an instant, Grandpa Tan's face completely reddened then turned livid. He frowned and glared fiercely at Qiao Feng with glaring eyes.

Qiao Feng unloosed his hand and put Grandpa Tan down on the floor then turned around and went out. Silent as the grave, Grandpa Tan followed him. The two of them, one ahead and one behind, went out of Weihui city. On the way, not just a few brave men in jianghu recognized Grandpa Tan and respectfully made way and saluted him. Grandpa Tan only let out a 'humph' sound and walked past them. Not long afterward, the two of them arrived at the side of that big wooden boat.

In a flash, Qiao Feng jumped onto the head of the boat. He pointed into the cabin and said: 'You come and see by yourself!'

After that, Grandpa Tan got on the boat. When he looked into the cabin, he saw his wife and Zhao Qiansun were leaning on each other affectionately and cuddling up in a corner of the cabin. Boiling with anger, Grandpa Tan sent a fierce palm attack towards Zhao Qiansun's head. A 'peng' sound was heard, Zhao Qiansun did not make a move, nor



did he strike back, and he did not dodge the attack either. When Grandpa Tan's palm touched the top of Zhao Qiansun's head, he felt something wrong. He hastily stretched out his hand to touch his wife's cheek and felt that it was ice-cold. It turned out Granny Tan had already been dead for a long time. The whole body of Grandpa Tan trembled but he was unwilling to give up, he held out his hand again to check her breathing, but she no longer breathed. Dumbfounded, he touched Zhao Qiansun's forehead and also felt that it was ice-cold. Grandpa Tan was extremely grieved and indignant, he turned around and glared fiercely at Qiao Feng, his eyes looked as if spouting fire.

Seeing that Granny Tan and Zhao Qiansun suddenly had died together unnaturally, Qiao Feng was also very astonished. When leaving the boat, he had only blocked some acupuncture points of the two of them, how could the two experts suddenly die like this? He lifted the corpse of Zhao Qiansun up and took a quick look at it. He saw that there was not any wound caused by weapons on the corpse, nor was there any bloodstain. He then pulled the clothes on Zhao Qiansun's chest, with a 'chi' sound, they were torn off. He saw a big black bruise on the chest of the corpse. Obviously Zhao Qiansun had been hit by a heavy palm attack. What was stranger was that inexplicably it looked like this serious injury had been caused by his own palm attack.

Grandpa Tan carried Granny Tan, turned around and unfastened her clothes to see the bruise on her chest. Her injury and the injury that Zhao Qiansun had suffered were exactly alike. Grandpa Tan wanted to cry but no tear came out. He said in a low voice to Qiao Feng: 'You're a beast in human face, such savagery!'

Amazed, Qiao Feng was speechless for a period of time, he only thought: 'Who used heavy palm attacks to kill Granny Tan and Zhao Qiansun? The killer's internal energy

is profound and very extraordinary. Could it be that it's also my adversary who came here? But how could he know that the two of them were in this boat?'

Feeling grieved at the violent death of his beloved wife, Grandpa Tan channeled internal energy into his two arms and struck towards Qiao Feng with all his strength. Qiao Feng dodged to one side, only loud ka-la-la sounds were heard, the palm force of Grandpa Tan had struck down one side of the boat's hood. Qiao Feng put out his right hand, grabbed Grandpa Tan's shoulder and said: 'Grandpa Tan, I definitely didn't killed your wife, do you believe me?' Grandpa Tan said: 'If it wasn't you then who?' Qiao Feng said: 'Now your life is in my hands. If I wanna kill you, it'd be as easy as turning my hand over. What's the good of deceiving you?' Grandpa Tan said: 'You only wanna find out who killed your father. My martial arts aren't as good as yours but how can I be fooled by you?' Qiao Feng said: 'Okay, you tell me the name of the enemy that killed my father, I'll bear the responsibility to avenge your wife's death on behalf of you.'

Grandpa Tan laughed wildly in a sorrowful voice. He tried to use his strength continuously three times to break loose from the enemy's grasp, however the power of the palm that Qiao Feng was lightly putting on his shoulder varied according to his power. Grandpa Tan struggled with powerful force but the force of the enemy's palm became stronger accordingly, therefore from beginning to end he was unable to escape from it. Grandpa Tan flew into a rage. He put his tongue between his two sets of teeth and gave it a powerful bite, severing it. With his mouth being filled with fresh blood, he spouted it towards Qiao Feng. Qiao Feng hastily dodged to one side. Grandpa Tan quickly ran over, sent the corpse of Zhao Qiansun away in a fierce kick and carried the corpse of Granny Tan tightly in his arms. His neck then loosened up and he died.

Seeing this kind of devastation, Qiao Feng also felt sorrowful and rather sorry for them. Even though he had not killed the Tans and Zhao Qiansun with his own hands, they had died because of him. If he wanted to obliterate the corpses and destroy the evidence, he only needed to stamp his foot to create a hole in the bilge of the boat, and the boat would sink to the bottom of the river. But he thought: 'If I hid these three corpses, wouldn't it look like I have a guilty conscience?' Hence he immediately got out of the cabin and disembarked, wanting to look for a footprint or clue on the river bank, but no trace was found.

He hurriedly returned to the inn. All along, A'Zhu had been waiting for him at the gate. Seeing him return unharmed, she was very happy, but seeing that he had a doubtful expression, she knew that his stalking of Zhao Qiansun and Granny Tan had been in vain. She said in a low voice: 'How was it?' Qiao Feng said: 'All died!' A'Zhu was slightly shocked. She asked: 'Granny Tan and Zhao Qiansun?' Qiao Feng said: 'Grandpa Tan as well. The three of them died altogether.'

A'Zhu only thought that he had killed them, even though she felt uneasy, it was inconvenient for her to be critical of him. She said: 'Zhao Qiansun is an accomplice in the murders of your parents, there's... there's nothing wrong with killing him.'

Qiao Feng shook his head and said: 'I didn't kill them' A'Zhu let out a sigh and said: 'If you didn't kill them then that's very good. I've always thought that Grandpa Tan and Granny Tan didn't do anything that offended you so they could be spared. But who killed them?'

Qiao Feng shook his head and said: 'I don't know!' He then counted on the fingers and said: 'There're only three people who know that prime criminal left in the world. We should act immediately and mustn't let the enemy go ahead of us all the time. We've always been in a disadvantageous position already.'

A'Zhu said: 'Correct. That Madame Ma hates you to the marrow, she'll be unwilling to tell you in any case, let alone the fact that forcing and questioning a widow aren't the deeds of a real man. Monk Zhiguang's temple is in Jiangnan, which is far from here. So, let's go to Tai'an in Shandong to find the Shan family!'

A trace of pity showed up in Qiao Feng's eyes. He said: 'A'Zhu, it's been hard on you for the past few days.' A'Zhu called out loudly: 'Innkeeper, innkeeper, quickly bring us the bill.' Surprised, Qiao Feng said: 'It won't be late to pay the bill tomorrow morning.' A'Zhu said: 'No, we must go quickly tonight. Don't let the enemy be ahead of us at every step.' Qiao Feng felt grateful to her and nodded.

In the dim twilight, they went out of Weihui city. On the way, they already heard other people noisily spreading the news that the Khitan demon Qiao Feng somehow had suddenly laid his murderous hands on Grandpa Tan, Granny Tan and Zhao Qiansun. When saying, these people looked around for fear that Qiao Feng would show up beside them at any time. They really did not know that Qiao Feng was right beside them, if he wanted to harm other people, these people truly would not be able to escape.

On the way they changed horses and went east quickly without stopping. Going to the second day, even though A'Zhu had not said any 'tired' word, she sat on horseback with a drowsy look, and several times she almost fell down from the horse. Seeing that she was really unable to keep enduring, Qiao Feng abandoned the horses and switched to carriage. The two of them slept in the big carriage for six or eight hours. After sleeping enough, they abandoned the carriage and used horses again, running at full speed. They kept going nonstop like this, A'Zhu happily said: 'In any case, this time we're gonna arrive ahead of that prime villain.' Both she and Qiao Feng did not know who the enemy was, hence when they mentioned that man they always called him the 'prime villain'.

But Qiao Feng was secretly worried because he felt that the 'prime villain' had always arrived earlier than himself at every single step, this man was not below himself in martial arts, his wits and schemes were far superior to those of his own, much less the fact that thus far he had only seen a dense fog before his own eyes, while the enemy could see clearly everything he did. All his life he had never met such a formidable enemy. However, the stronger the enemy was, the higher Qiao Feng's mettle was, and he was not the least afraid.

Impartial Judge Shan Zheng resided outside the Eastern gate of Tai'an city in Shandong. He was widely known within Tai'an. When Qiao Feng and A'Zhu arrived in Tai'an, it was already at twilight. After asking clearly where the Shan family was, they immediately went there through the city. After they came out of the Eastern gate and went for one li (0.5 km), they saw thick smoke rising in the sky; there was a fire somewhere. After that, they heard 'dang-dang' sounds of gongs and the sounds of people shouting from afar: 'Fire! Fire! Quickly fight the fire.'

Qiao Feng did not pay attention to that and urged the horse on, getting closer and closer to the fire. He heard someone shouted: 'Quickly fight the fire, quickly fight the fire! It's the Impartial Shan family!'

Qiao Feng and A'Zhu were frightened, they reined in and looked at each other. Both of them thought: 'Could it be that the prime villain has arrived earlier than us again?' A'Zhu consoled him: 'Shan Zheng has very good martial arts, even if his house was burned, he definitely wouldn't be burned to death inside.'

Qiao Feng shook his head. After he had killed the Shan Clan's two Tigers, the Shan family had had a deep hatred towards him. Arriving in Tai'an this time, even though he had no intention of killing other people, he thought Shan Zheng and his descendants would definitely not forgive himself, therefore originally he had prepared to get into a

big battle. Unexpectedly, when he had not yet arrived at the manor, the opponent had already met with a disaster. Therefore he could not help feeling sad and sympathetic to him.

The horses gradually came near the Shan manor. Qiao Feng and A'Zhu only felt the broiling heat and saw red flames dancing boisterously. This was really a big fire.

At this time, villagers all around had flocked here to fight the fire, some carrying water and some scattering sand. Fortunately, there were deep trenches around the Shan manor and no one lived in the vicinity of the manor therefore the fire did not spread.

Qiao Feng and A'Zhu galloped to the side of the scene and got off the horses. They heard one man sigh: 'Old Master Shan was such a good person. He always helped the poor and disaster-stricken people in this region, for the past several decades he had so many meritorious and virtuous acts, why is it that not only was his house burned down but no one in his whole family of thirty something people could escape either?' Another man said: 'His enemies must've set fire to the manor then blocked the doors to prevent them from escaping. Otherwise, as even a five year old child in the Shan family knew martial arts, how come they couldn't escape?' The first man said: 'I've heard that Great Master Shan, Second Master Shan and Fifth Master Shan were killed in Henan by a villain called Qiao Feng or something. This time someone came here to commit arson, could it be that it is this prime villain as well?'

When mentioning that enemy in their conversations A'Zhu and Qiao Feng had called him the 'prime villain', at this moment, hearing those two villagers also say 'prime villain', they could not refrain from looking at each other.

The man who was rather younger said: 'Of course it's Qiao Feng.' When he said this, he lowered his voice and continued: 'He must've led a large number of subordinates and broken into the manor then ruthlessly slaughtered the

Shan family. Oh, Heaven really doesn't have eyes.' The older man said: 'This Qiao Feng guy has done many evils. In the future he'll certainly die a hundred times more miserably than the Shan family's masters did.'

Hearing them cursing Qiao Feng, A'Zhu was annoyed. She stretched out her hand and slapped the horse on the side of its neck. Startled, the horse shot out its left hoof, which kicked that man right in his bottom. That man shouted 'Ah' and fell flat on his face. A'Zhu said: 'What nonsense did you say?' After receiving a kick by the horse, that man remembered that the 'prime villain' Qiao Feng had very many subordinates, hence he was so frightened that he did not dare to utter a word and hurriedly went away.

Qiao Feng smiled but his smiling expression carried thirty percent sadness. He and A'Zhu went to another side of the fire. They could hear everyone discussing in quick succession. All of them said the same that no one among the thirty something people of the Shan family was able to escape, irrespective of being male, female, old or young. When Qiao Feng smelled the foul-smelling air of burned corpses which was coming out gust after gust from the fire, he knew that what they said were not false; all the men, women, old people and young people in Shan Zheng's whole family had really been buried in the fire.

A'Zhu said in a low voice: 'This prime villain is really ruthless. He killed Shan Zheng and his sons; it couldn't be helped. But why did he gotta kill his whole family? Why did he need to burn down even the house?' Qiao Feng uttered a 'humph' sound and said: 'This is called cutting the weeds and digging up the roots. If it had been me, I would've burned the house as well.' A'Zhu was startled and asked: 'What?' Qiao Feng said: 'That evening in the apricot forest Shan Zheng said some sentences, most proly you heard them as well. He said: 'There're several letters by that leading big brother hidden in my house, I already compared this letter with the handwriting of them. This is really a

genuine letter.” A’Zhu sighed and said: ‘That’s right. Even though he already killed Shan Zheng, he was afraid that you’d go into the Shan family’s manor and successfully find those letters, and then you’d still be able to know his name. But if he burned the manor to the ground with a handful of kindling, there wouldn’t be any letter left.’

At this moment, there were more and more people gathering to fight the fire, but the fire was being intense, when pailfuls of water were splashed on the fire, they instantly changed into white air, but they were not able to hold back the fire. Flames and heat were spurted out gust after gust, making everyone repeatedly go backwards. The crowd on the one hand lamented and on the other hand they severely cursed Qiao Feng. The offensive language of the peasants was certainly extremely unpleasant to hear.

A’Zhu feared that after hearing these irrational words of abuse Qiao Feng would get furious and start another massacre, and then these peasants would really be wretched. She stole a look at him and saw a strange expression on his face; he seemed to be sad and also seemed to be regretful, but above all, he looked sympathetic; it seemed he was thinking that these peasants were very silly and not worth killing. She heard him let out a deep sigh and say dejectedly: ‘Let’s go to Mt. Tiantai!’

He really had no alternative but to mention Mt. Tiantai. Even though Zhiguang dashi (great monk) had taken part in the battle that killed his parents that year; afterward, he had developed a strong ambition to go to remote or alien places to gather tree bark to cure people in the region consisting of Zhejiang, Fujian, Guangdong and Guangxi of malaria and illnesses caused by miasma; countless people had been saved, but for that reason he himself had had a serious illness and after recovering he had lost all of his martial arts. There was no one in jianghu who did not respect Zhiguang dashi for this deed of saving the common people; when mentioning him, everyone called him the ‘Living Buddha of



Ten Thousand Families'. Were it not because Qiao Feng had no other choice, he definitely would be unwilling to make things difficult for Zhiguang dashi.

The two of them left Tai'an and chose ways to go south. But this time Qiao Feng did not go quickly as if his life was at risk. He thought that if he himself handled pressing matters leisurely, maybe he would be able to protect Zhiguang dashi's life; and that if he went at double speed as before, when he arrived at Mt. Tiantai, probably he would also see the corpse of Zhiguang dashi, and maybe even the temple where the monk lived would already be burned to the ground; furthermore, Zhiguang usually roamed everywhere, hence he might not be staying at the temple on Mt. Tiantai.

Mt. Tiantai was in Zhedong. This time, on the way going south from Tai'an, Qiao Feng and A'Zhu went slowly as if they went sightseeing and talked about strange things and anecdotes in jianghu. If their minds were not full of worries, this would have been a joyful sightseeing trip.

That day, after arriving in Zhenjiang, the two of them went to Jinshan temple to get a view of the river (this is Yangzi River). While watching the water of the river rapidly rolling east unceasingly, Qiao Feng suddenly remembered a matter and said: 'Maybe the 'leading big brother' and the 'prime villain' are the same person.' A'Zhu clapped her hands and said: 'That's right. Why have we never thought of this before?' Qiao Feng said: 'Of course they may be two different people as well, but these two people must have a close relationship, otherwise that prime villain wouldn't go as far as using every possible means to hide that leading big brother's identity. But when even people such as Chief Wang were willing to follow that 'leading big brother', he must be an extraordinary person. That 'prime villain' must be extraordinary like this too. How come there're such two extraordinary people in the world without me knowing even one of them? So my guess is that these two people are most

likely the same man. If I kill that 'prime villain', I'd get revenge for the murders of my parents.'

A'Zhu nodded in approval and said: 'Great Master Qiao, in the apricot forest that evening, those people related what had happened that year, I'm afraid... I'm afraid...' Saying this, her voice could not help getting somewhat shaky.

Qiao Feng continued: 'You're afraid that the prime villain was present in the apricot forest?' A'Zhu said in a trembling voice: 'Yes. In the apricot forest, that Impartial Judge Shan Zheng guy said that there were letters written by the leading big brother hidden in his house. His whole family was then burned to the ground... Oh, when thinking about this matter, I'm very scared.' She slightly shivered and leaned on one side of Qiao Feng.

Qiao Feng said: 'This man is extremely cruel and merciless. People like him are rare in the world. Zhao Qiansun'd rather lose all reputation than reveal his identity, and Shan Zheng was also on friendly terms with him. Who could've expected that he would murder these two people? There wasn't any such formidable person in the apricot forest that evening, was there?' After pondering for a long time, he continued: 'There's another matter that I find strange.' A'Zhu asked: 'What is it?'

Qiao Feng looked at a sailboat on the river and said: 'This prime villain's intelligence and planning skill are better than mine in all respects. In terms of martial arts, it seems he's not below me either. If he wants to take my life, I'm afraid he wouldn't have any difficulties. Why does he need to be afraid that I'll find out who my enemy is like this?'

A'Zhu said: 'Great Master Qiao, you're just too modest. Even though that prime villain is formidable, he's in fact extremely afraid of you. I guess in these days he's been shaking with the fear that you'll find out who he is. Otherwise, he wouldn't have to murder the two old masters Qiao, Xuan Ku dashi, Zhao Qiansun, Granny Tan and the whole family of Impartial Judge.'

Qiao Feng nodded and said: 'That may be true as well.' He then smiled at her and said: 'As he doesn't dare to come to attack me, he certainly wouldn't dare to approach you. You don't need to be afraid.' After a long while, he sighed and said: 'This person is really good at scheming. It's a shame that I, Qiao Feng, am called a hero when I've been a toy in other people's hands without any power to strike back.'

After crossing Changjiang River (aka Yangzi River), one day they crossed Qiantang River and arrived in Tiantai county seat. Qiao Feng and A'Zhu rested at an inn for one night. In the morning of the next day, just as they wanted to ask people in the inn about the way to go to Mt. Tiantai, the innkeeper hurriedly came in, saying: 'Great Master Qiao, a master from Zhiguan Temple on Mt. Tiantai comes to pay you a visit.'

Qiao Feng was frightened because when checking in he had conveniently said that his surname had been Guan. So he asked: 'Why do you call me Great Master Qiao?' The innkeeper replied: 'The master from Zhiguan Temple told me about Great Master Qiao's appearance. There's not the least bit of inaccuracy.' Qiao Feng and A'Zhu looked at each other and both of them were amazed. They had already disguised themselves; moreover, they looked rather different as compared to when they had been in Tai'an, Shandong; yet oddly, as soon as they arrived in Tiantai, they were recognized by other people. Qiao Feng said: 'Okay, invite him to come here.'

The innkeeper turned around and went out. Before long, he conducted back a short and stout monk who was around thirty years of age. The monk put his palms together to Qiao Feng in salute, saying: 'My master Zhiguang has ordered my little self Pozhe to invite Great Master Qiao and Miss Ruan to visit our humble temple.' Seeing that the monk even knew A'Zhu's surname was Ruan, Qiao Feng was more astonished, so he asked: 'How could you know my surname, Master?'

Monk Pozhe said: 'My master told me that there are a hero surnamed Qiao and a lady surnamed Ruan staying at Qinggai inn in Tiantai county seat and ordered my little self to welcome and conduct you up the mountain. This is Great Master Qiao. Where is Miss Ruan then?' A'Zhu had disguised herself as a middle-aged man therefore monk Pozhe was unable to recognize her and thought that Miss Ruan was not here.

Qiao Feng asked again: 'We arrived here yesterday evening. How could your honorable master know about it? Could it be that he really has divination skill?'

When Pozhe had not yet replied, the innkeeper interposed: 'The old divine monk at Zhiguan Temple has great magical powers, just by performing a quick calculation on his fingers, he already knew that Great Master Qiao was gonna come. Needless to say, he can see clearly what are going to happen in one day or two. The old master can predict even the matters of five hundred years later with the accuracy as high as sixty or seventy percent as well.'

Qiao Feng knew that Zhiguang dashi had a resounding reputation and the ordinary and ignorant people worshiped him, hence he did not talk much, saying: 'Miss Ruan will come later. Please take the two of us to your honorable master so that we can pay our respects to him.' Monk Pozhe said: 'Yes.' When Qiao Feng wanted to pay the bill for the room and the food, the innkeeper hastily said: 'Great Master, you're a guest of Zhiguan Temple, it's a great honor for us to have you in this small inn. No matter what, we don't dare to accept these several Qian (~ 0.4 g) of silver for the rent and food.'

Qiao Feng said: 'We thank you for your hospitality then.' Inwardly, he thought: 'Monk Zhiguang is kind to the people so I've written off the grudge concerning his murders of my parents. I only hope he'll agree to reveal the identities of the 'leading big brother' and the prime villain. Then I'll be perfectly satisfied.' Without losing any time, he followed

Pozhe to come out of the county seat and go towards Mt. Tiantai.

Mt. Tiantai had a beautiful and tranquil landscape but the mountain paths were rather steep, rugged and hard to go along. According to legend, during the Han Dynasty, Liu Chen and Ruan Zhao went into Mt. Tiantai by accident and met celestial maidens. Thus it was clear that the landscape here had to be extremely beautiful; but the mountain paths were winding and tortuous, and very hard to recognize. Going behind monk Pozhe, Qiao Feng saw that his footwork was very good, but he obviously did not know martial arts. However, in spite of that, Qiao Feng did not loosen up his caution at all, thinking: 'The opponents already know it's me, how can they not be on strict guard? Even though monk Zhiguang is a person of high virtue, other people may not think the same as him.'

Surprisingly, he had a pleasant and uneventful journey to Zhiguan Temple. Among the cloisters on Mt. Tiantai, Guoqing Temple was very famous in the world; in the Sui Dynasty, Zhizhe dashi, an eminent monk, used to stay at this temple and made the Tiantai school of Buddhism greatly flourish; hence it had been an important place of Buddhism for the past several hundred years. However, in wulin, Zhiguan Temple had a more resounding name. At first sight, Qiao Feng noticed that it was merely a common small temple, and most of the plaster and the paint on the outside of the temple had already peeled off. Had it not been for monk Pozhe's leading, had Qiao Feng and A'Zhu come here by themselves, they would not have believed that this ordinary temple was the famous Zhiguan Temple.

Monk Pozhe pushed the door of the temple open and said loudly: 'Master, Great Master Qiao has arrived.'

There was the voice of Zhiguang, saying: 'Honored guests from afar, this old monk is sorry for being late in welcoming you.' As he finished, he walked to the door and put his palms together in salute.

Before seeing Zhiguang, Qiao Feng had always been worried that the prime villain would go ahead of himself and kill the monk. Now seeing Zhiguang with his own eyes, Qiao Feng was at ease. Without delay, he and A'Zhu removed their disguises and met the monk with their real faces. Qiao Feng made a deep bow and said: 'Dashì, I'm deeply sorry for disturbing your serene ascetic life.'

Zhiguang said: 'That's fine, that's fine! Qiao shizhu (almsgiver), originally you're surnamed Xiao, do you know about it?'

Qiao Feng's body trembled. Even though he knew that he himself was a Khitan, he had never known the surname of his father. In this moment, hearing Zhiguang say that his surname was 'Xiao', he could not help having a cold sweat because he knew that his origin was becoming clearer step by step. He immediately bowed, saying: 'My humble self is unfilial, so I come here to entreat dashì (great monk) to advise me.'

Zhiguang nodded and said: 'Pray be seated.'

After the three of them had sat firmly on the chairs, Pozhe brought tea out. Seeing that the appearances of the two had changed and that A'Zhu had turned into a girl, he was exceedingly surprised. However, he did not dare to ask anything due to his master's presence.

Zhiguang continued: 'On the stone wall outside of Yanmen Pass, your father left behind a piece of writing, calling himself Xiao Yuanshan. In the writing he called you 'Feng'er.' We retained your name, but because we entrusted you to Qiao Sanhuai for nurture, you had to go with his surname.'

Tears streamed down Qiao Feng's face. He stood up, saying: 'I've never known my father's surname until today. It's all thanks to dashì's favor that I know it. Please accept a bow of mine.' As he finished saying, he bowed down. A'Zhu also stood up.

Zhiguang put his palms together to return the salute and said: 'How can it be called a favor?'

The national surname of the Liao Empire was Yelu, and the surname of the empresses of successive Liao dynasties had always been Xiao. Because the Xiao clan had been the clan of empresses from generation to generation, it had had a lot of generals and officials in the imperial courts, and in the Liao Empire it enjoyed great ascendancy. At times, when a Liao emperor was too young, a Xiao empress dowager would assume power and make the clan even more powerful and influential. When Qiao Feng suddenly knew that he himself was from a great Khitan clan, for a period of time all sorts of feelings welled up in his heart, and he was in a trance for a long time. Then he turned to A'Zhu, sighed and said: 'From now on, I'm Xiao Feng, and not Qiao Feng.' A'Zhu said: 'Yes, Great Master Xiao.'

Zhiguang said: 'Hero Xiao, you've most probably seen the words left behind on the stone wall outside of Yanmen Pass, haven't you?' Xiao Feng shook his head, saying: 'No, I haven't. When I arrived at the outside of Yanmen Pass, the words on the stone wall had already been scraped off completely by someone. There was no trace left.'

Zhiguang gently let out a sigh and said: 'The matter was well in the past, the words on the cliff could be scraped off, but how could these several tens of people be brought back to life?' He took out from his sleeve a very large piece of cloth, saying: 'Xiao shizhu, this is a rubbing of the writing left behind on the cliff.'

Xiao Feng trembled with fear, received the large cloth and opened it. He saw that it was made of many rags of clothes stitched together. All the words on the cloth were white hollow ones, the strokes were strange, they looked very similar to Han characters but he did not know a single word. Qiao Feng knew that it was the Khitan language. However, the strokes were powerful and sturdy, looking like saber chops and axe hacks. That day, Zhiguang had said

that this piece of writing had been engraved on the rock by his father just before his death. Qiao Feng's vision could not help getting blurred, and his tears streamed down and fell onto the cloth drop by drop. He said: 'Dashi, could you interpret it please?'

Zhiguang dashi said: 'At that time, after we had made a rubbing, we asked people who knew the Khitan language inside of Yanmen Pass to explain it. Several people all said the same, so most probably they were correct. Xiao shizhu, this line of words says: 'Feng'er is exactly one year old. I and my wife were going to my mother-in-law's house to attend a banquet. On the way suddenly we encountered the Southern Dynasty's bandits...' Hearing to here, Xiao Feng felt an ache in his heart. He heard Zhiguang continue: "Things happened quickly, my wife was killed by the bandits, making me lose the desire to live on in the world. My master in martial arts is a Han in the Southern Dynasty, I once took a vow in front of him that I would never kill Han people, but today unexpectedly I've killed more than ten of them. I'm both ashamed and sorrowful; after my death, I won't have the face to meet my enshi (kind master). - Xiao Yuanshan's last words."

After Zhiguang finished, Xiao Feng respectfully received the large cloth which had the rubbing, saying: 'These are the last words left behind by my predecessor. Dashi, please bestow it on me.' Zhiguang said: 'I should respectfully give it to you.'

Qiao Feng's mind was in chaos. Thinking of his father's sorrow at that time, he understood that his father had jumped off the cliff to commit suicide not only because of being grieved at the miserable death of his mother, but also because he had broken a vow by killing many Han people and felt ashamed of it before his school.

Zhiguang slowly uttered a sigh and said: 'At first we only thought that your father was leading Khitan warriors to Shaolin Monastery to rob sutras. Only after we studied the



writing on the stone wall did we know that it was a misunderstanding, a huge mistake. Your father was already determined to commit suicide so there was no reason for him to leave false words to deceive other people before his death. If he had been going to Shaolin Monastery to rob sutras, why was he taking along a lady who didn't know the least bit of martial arts and was embracing a baby of just over one year of age? After the incident, we investigated the source of this news about a Shaolin sutra robbery, it turned out that it came from the mouth of an ignorant absurd person. This person deliberately played a trick on the leading big brother and wanted him to rush thousands of li (1 li = 0.5 km) about to make fun of him.'

Xiao Feng said: 'Oh, so it was only to play a joke. What happened to this absurd person?'

Zhiguang said: 'After finding out about the truth, the leading big brother was very angry, but that absurd person had already run away. No one knew his whereabouts. From then on, he has disappeared into thin air. It's been thirty years since that incident, perhaps he is no more in the world.'

Qiao Feng said: 'Dashi, thank you very much for letting me know about the cause and the aftermath of this incident, making Xiao Feng become a new man. I only want to ask you about another matter.' Zhiguang asked: 'Xiao shizhu (almsgiver), what do you want to ask?' Qiao Feng said: 'Who is this leading big brother after all?'

Zhiguang said: 'I've heard that Xiao shizhu has killed four people, Elder Xu of the Beggar Society, Grandpa Tan, Granny Tan and Zhao Qiansun, to investigate this matter, and you've killed the whole family of Impartial Judge Shan Zheng then burned the Shan family's manor to the ground as well. I expected that sooner or later you would come to this place. Please wait for a little while; this old monk is going to show you one object.' As he finished saying he stood up.

When Qiao Feng was about to explain that he had not killed Elder Xu and the other people, Zhiguang had already turned around then walked into the rear hall.

After a while, monk Pozhe walked into the parlor and said: 'My master invites the two of you to the meditation room to talk.' Following him, Qiao Feng and A'Zhu passed through an alley which ran in the shade of dense bamboos to arrive at the front of a small house. Monk Pozhe pushed the door open, saying: 'Please!' Qiao Feng and A'Zhu walked in.

They saw Zhiguang sitting cross-legged on a bulrush mat. He smiled at Xiao Feng, extended his finger and wrote on the floor. The floor of this small house had not been swept for a long time hence there was a thick layer of dust on it. They saw him write on the dust:

'All things are the same; all creatures are equal.

Sages and animals are treated evenly.

Han or Khitan is reality and also fantasy.

Kindness, enmity, honor and disgrace all are mere dust.'

As he finished writing, he slightly smiled and closed his eyes.

Looking at the eight sentences on the floor, Qiao Feng was entranced, thinking: 'From a Buddhist's viewpoint, not only are humanitarians and villains the same, but there is also no difference between animals, hungry ghosts, emperors and generals, so whether I'm a Han or a Khitan is really not worth mentioning. But I'm not a Buddhist, how can I be detached like this?' So he said: 'Dashi, in the end who is that leading big brother? Please tell me.' He asked several times but Zhiguang only smiled without replying.

When Qiao Feng fixed his eyes on Zhiguang, he could not help but jump out of his skin because he saw that despite having a smiling expression, the monk seemed to be stiff and motionless.

Qiao Feng called out 'Zhiguang dashi' a few times but still the monk did not make any movement, hence he stretched out his hand to check his breathing. It turned out the monk's breathing had already stopped. He had already passed away. Qiao Feng was so sad that he was speechless. He knelt down and bowed several times. Then he waved to A'Zhu, saying: 'Let's go!'

The two of them quietly went out of Zhiguan Temple. Crestfallen, they returned to Tiantai county seat.

When they had gone for more than ten li, Xiao Feng said: 'A'Zhu, I had no intention of harming Zhiguang dashi, he... he... why did he gotta make himself suffer like this?' A'Zhu said: 'This eminent monk understood the world thoroughly and was greatly enlightened so life and death were the same to him.' Xiao Feng asked: 'Can you guess why he knew that we were going to Zhiguan Temple?' A'Zhu replied: 'I think... I think that it's a deed of that prime villain again.' Xiao Feng said: 'I think so too. This prime villain told Zhiguang dashi in advance that we were going to find him to take revenge. Zhiguang dashi thought that he wouldn't be able to escape from my murderous hands so after that conversation with us he immediately took poison to commit suicide.'

The two of them looked at each other and did not say anything for a long while.

A'Zhu suddenly said: 'Great Master Xiao, there're some undue words that I would like to say, please don't take offense at them.' Xiao Feng said: 'Why do you need to stand on this kind of ceremony? Of course I don't mind them.' A'Zhu said: 'I think those words that Zhiguang dashi wrote on the floor are very reasonable. 'Han or Khitan is reality and also fantasy. Kindness, enmity, honor and disgrace all are mere dust.' In fact, it doesn't matter if you're a Han or a Khitan. Is there any difference between them? Perhaps you're already tired of living by the tip of the saber in jianghu. It'd be better to go to the outside of Yanmen Pass to go hunting and do pasture, and from now on pay no

attention to the kindness, enmity, honor and disgrace in wulin in Central Plains.'

Xiao Feng let out a sigh and said: 'I'm tired of this business which involves struggling for survival on the tips of the sabers already. It'd really be a lot happier to go to the prairies in the North of the Great Wall to gallop on horseback, set free eagles, release dogs, chase rabbits, and from now on have no worry. A'Zhu, will you come to see me after I've returned to the North of the Great Wall?'

A'Zhu blushed and said in a low voice: 'I said 'do pasture', didn't I? You'll gallop on horseback and go hunting, and I'll put cows and sheep out to pasture.' As she said to here, she lowered her head.

Even though Xiao Feng was a straightforward man, he understood clearly the implication of these several sentences of hers; she meant that she wanted to live together with him in the North of the Great Wall for life and would not return to Central Plains again. Originally Xiao Feng saved her merely because of the mettle of the moment; only after she went to the outside of Yanmen Pass in pursuit of him then went together with him to Weihui, Tai'an and Tiantai, rushing about thousands of li, did he feel that she was very tender and amiable. At this moment, hearing her express her feelings, he could not help but be moved, so he put out his bulky palm and held her small hand, saying: 'A'Zhu, you treat me so well. Don't you detest and reject me because of my lowly Khitan origin?'

A'Zhu replied: 'The Han are human, the Khitan are also human. How can one be high and the other be low? I... I like to be a Khitan, this is my heartfelt desire, there's not the least bit of constraint imposed on me.' As she said towards the end, her voice became as low as the buzzing noise of a mosquito and almost inaudible.

Very happy, Xiao Feng suddenly grabbed her waist and threw her up in the air. While she was falling down, he gently caught her and put her on the ground. Then he

looked at her with a smiling expression and said loudly: 'A'Zhu, from now on you'll follow me to ride on horseback and go hunting, and pasture cattle and sheep. You will never regret this?'

A'Zhu adopted a stern countenance, saying: 'Even if it was following you to commit murder, arson and robbery, I would never regret it. Even if following you meant to experience various sufferings and all kinds of torments, I would still be glad about it.'

Xiao Feng said loudly: 'Once I, Xiao Feng, have today; needless to say, I don't like to be reinstated as the Beggar Society's Chief; even if they were to ask me to be the emperor, I wouldn't care either. A'Zhu, let's go to Xinyang to find Madame Ma. It won't matter if she is willing to tell us or not. This is the last person that we're gonna find. After a question, we're gonna left for the North of the Great Wall to go hunting and pasture cattle and sheep!'

A'Zhu said: 'Great Master Xiao...' Xiao Feng said: 'From today on, don't call me great master, second master or something. You call me big brother!' Totally blushed, A'Zhu said in a low voice: 'How can I deserve it?' Xiao Feng said: 'Are you willing to call me so?' A'Zhu smiled and said: 'Extremely willing, but I don't deserve it.' Xiao Feng laughed and said: 'Now you try calling me so one time then.' A'Zhu softly said: 'Big... Big Brother!'

'Ha-ha,' Xiao Feng laughed loudly and said: 'That's right! From now on, I, Xiao Feng, am no longer alone and despised as a lowly barbarian because at least in the world there's a person... there's a person...' For the moment, he did not know what he should say.

A'Zhu continued: 'There's a person who deeply respects you, admires you, appreciates you, is willing to stay by your side forever and through all eternity to endure misfortunes, humiliations, dangers and tribulations together with you.' She said very sincerely.

Xiao Feng let out a long volley of laughs, which echoed throughout the valley. Thinking that A'Zhu had said she would 'endure misfortunes, humiliations, dangers and tribulations together with him', he felt grateful to her because even though she knew clearly that there would likely be a lot of trials in the future, she was still willing to put up with them with no regret, and so two streams of tears rolled down on his cheeks even though he was having a smiling expression.

The house of the former Vice Chief of the Beggar Society Ma Dayuan was located in Xinyang village, Henan. From Mt. Tiantai in Jiangnan to Xinyang, Xiao Feng and A'Zhu would have to travel thousands of li, and this was not a journey that they could finish in one day.

Ever since the two of them had opened their hearts to each other on Mt. Tiantai, they had found themselves very attached to each other. On the way they rode the horses slowly and saw that the natural scenic views were large, wide and totally charming. A'Zhu was not good at drinking wine but in order to make Xiao Feng happier, she always forced herself to drink several cups of wine with him, which made her loveable face become rosy, making her look even sweeter. At first, Xiao Feng was full of indignation but thanks to A'Zhu laughing and talking to him, and wittily joking with him nonstop, most of his grief and indignation disappeared. In this northward journey from Jiangnan to the Middle Land (Zhongzhou – ancient name of Henan) his state of mind was very different than it had been when they had been hastening to Shandong from Yanmen Pass. Sometimes Xiao Feng recalled and felt that this thousands-of-li journey was hazy just like a great series of dreams; at first, there had been continuous nightmares, but towards the end, they had become nice dreams; were it not for the delightful loveable little girl A'Zhu at his side, he really would wonder if he was still in a dream.

One day, they arrived in Guangzhou; it would take them no more than two days to reach Xinyang from here. A'Zhu said: 'Big Brother, how should we inquire Madame Ma, you think?'

In the apricot forest and at Juxian Manor those days, Madame Ma's words and expression had been full of hostility towards Xiao Feng; even though Xiao Feng had been very unhappy at those times, after those incidents he thought that because she had lost her husband and firmly believed that he himself had killed him, it was normal for her to abominate himself, and if she did not hate himself, it would be unreasonable. He also thought that because she was a widow who did not know martial arts, if he threatened her, his hero status would be lost, let alone asking her by force. Hearing A'Zhu ask so, he could not help hesitating and did not know how to reply. After being at a loss for a while, he said: 'I think we'll have no choice but to ask her amicably and hope that she'll be reasonable and no longer wrongly accuse me of killing her husband. A'Zhu, it'd be better if you go talk to her. Is that ok? You're clever in your words and both of you are female. I'm afraid if she sees my face she'll be full of hatred and everything will immediately come to a standstill.'

A'Zhu smiled, saying: 'I have a plan, but I'm afraid you'll think that it's not good.' Xiao Feng hastily said: 'What is the plan?' A'Zhu said: 'You're a great hero, a real man, so you can't extort the truth from her. But how about letting me trick her?'

Xiao Feng happily said: 'It'd be the best if you can trick her into revealing the truth. A'Zhu, you know, days and nights I've been hoping that I'll be able to personally cut the prime murderer of my father to death. I'm a Khitan so his exposure of my true origin was a thing that should be done as it allowed me to know who my ancestors are. I should've been very grateful to him. But why did he kill my foster parents? Kill my enshi (kind master)? Force me to harm my

friends, bear infamy and become the the enemy of the heroes in the world? If I can't chop him into pieces, how would I be able to put myself at ease and ride on horseback, go hunting, and pasture cattle and sheep with you for life?' Towards the end, his voice became louder and louder. For the past few days, his expression was no longer gloomy as before, despite that, however, his hatred towards the prime villain had not yet diminished in the least.

A'Zhu said: 'This prime villain has maliciously done you so much harm. I only hope that I'll be able to slash at him several times to help you vent your anger. After capturing him, we'll also arrange a great banquet for heroes and extraordinary people in the world then explain the injustices you've suffered in front of everyone to restore your clear reputation.'

Xiao Feng sighed and said: 'That's not necessary. By killing so many people at Juxian Manor, I've caused a deep hatred of me in the world's heroes. And I'm not asking for forgiveness from other people either. I, Xiao Feng, only hope to put a stop to this matter to give myself peace of mind, then I and you will gallop to the North of the Great Wall and become friends with tigers, wolves, cattle and sheep for life and never see these heroes and brave men of Central Plains again.'

A'Zhu happily said: 'Thank heavens for that. That's what I've been eager for.' She smiled, saying: 'Big Brother, I wanna disguise as a person and trick Madame Ma into revealing the name of the prime villain.'

Xiao Feng slapped his thigh and cried: 'Yes! Yes! Why haven't I thought of this? Nothing can be better than your masterful disguising skill in dealing with this matter. Who do you wanna disguise as?'

A'Zhu said: 'I would need to ask you about that. When Vice-Chief Ma was still alive, who in the Beggar Society was he friendliest with? I'm gonna disguise as this person.'



Thinking that this is her husband's close friend, I think Madame Ma won't hide the truth.'

Xiao Feng said: 'Oh, the people closest to Brother Ma in the Beggar Society are Captain Wang, Quan Guanqing and Elder Chen; besides, he had a deep friendship with the Elder of Rule Enforcement Bai Shijing too.' A'Zhu made a 'hum' sound and tilted her head to recall the appearances of these people. Xiao Feng continued: 'Unlike me who am fond of drinking and roughhousing, Brother Ma was a calm and prudent man so he rarely drank or talked with me. Quan Guanqing and Bai Shijing have similar personalities to his so they often studied martial arts together.'

A'Zhu said: 'I don't know who Captain Wang is. The jute bag of Elder Chen's is full of poisonous snakes and scorpions. I got goosebumps as soon as I saw it. My disguising skill can't make me look like him. Quan Guanqing has a very tall frame so it'll take quite a while to disguise as him. I'm afraid if I stay in Madame Ma's house for a long time to slowly and tactfully sound her out I'll give myself away. It'd be better if I disguise as Elder Bai. He talked to me several times at Juxian Manor so imitating him is the easiest.'

Xiao Feng smiled, saying: 'Elder Bai treated you very well and tried his best to ask Divine Doctor Xue to cure your injury. Wouldn't it be wrong to disguise as him to deceive other people?'

A'Zhu laughed and said: 'I'll disguise as Elder Bai only to do good, and not to do evil or harm his reputation.'

They immediately disguised in a small inn. A'Zhu changed Xiao Feng into a 5-bag disciple of the Beggar Society who would be considered to be Elder Bai's attendant. She told him to speak as little as possible for fear that Madame Ma was meticulous and would recognize the flaws. Xiao Feng saw that after disguising herself as Elder Bai, A'Zhu had a frosty face which looked solemn even without being angry. This was really the Elder of Rule

Enforcement that was awed by tens of thousand of Beggar Society disciples from the north to the south. Not only did she bear a close resemblance to Bai Shijing, her behavior and words were also exactly the same as those of his. Xiao Feng and Bai Shijing had been friends for almost ten years, yet he was unable to see any difference between his appearance and A'Zhu's disguise.

The two of them went to Xinyang. On the way, when Xiao Feng saw Beggar Society disciples, he would use the Society's argot to talk with them and ask about movements of the leading people of the Society; he also made public that Elder Bai had arrived in Xinyang to let Madame Ma know about their visit in advance. As long as she already had first impressions of it in her mind, even if there were flaws in A'Zhu's disguise, she would not be able to recognize them.

Ma Dayuan's house was in the western suburb of Xinyang and was thirty li (0.5 km) or so away from the city. After asking local Beggar Society disciples about the way to get there, Xiao Feng and A'Zhu went to the Ma family. They deliberately went slowly and stalled; only at dusk did they arrive. During the day, everything could be seen clearly so their disguises might have been recognized easily, but in the evening, everything looked indistinct so it would be easy for them to trick Madame Ma.

When they arrived at the outside of Ma Dayuan's house, they saw a brooklet go around three small tiled houses. Beside the houses were two weeping willow trees, and in front of them was a piece of flat ground which looked like a drying ground of a farmhouse but there was a pit at each of its four corners. Very familiar with Ma Dayuan's martial arts, Xiao Feng knew that Ma Dayuan had normally used these four pits to practice his skills. He could not help feeling sad because now they had been separated by life and death. When he was about to knock the door, suddenly there was a grinding noise, the door was opened, and a woman walked

out in a full-length white mourning dress. She was Madame Ma.

Madame Ma cast a glance at Xiao Feng then bowed to A'Zhu in salute, saying: 'Elder Bai's exalted presence at this humble house is really beyond my expectations. Please come in for some tea.'

A'Zhu said: 'Dimei (younger sis-in-law), there's an important matter that I must consult with you so I've come here without being invited. Please forgive me.'

With her whole body being covered in a white mourning dress, Madame Ma's expression resembled a smile yet she was not smiling and the corners of her mouth had a trace of hidden bitterness. In this moment, the sun which was setting towards the back of the mountains was illuminating her face with a dull yellow light. Meeting her this time, Xiao Feng was not stirred up as two times before. He saw that even though there were vague wrinkles at the corners of her eyes and she was around thirty five or thirty six and not wearing make-up, her complexion did not seem to be less white and delicate than that of A'Zhu's.

The two of them immediately followed Madame Ma into the house. They saw that the hall was rather small, there was a table in the center, and on both sides of the table were put four chairs so there was very little space left. An aged maid servant brought tea out. Then Madame Ma asked Xiao Feng's name. A'Zhu conveniently made up a name for him.

Madame Ma asked: 'Elder Bai, I'm wondering what you want to instruct me in this exalted visit?' A'Zhu replied: 'Elder Xu passed away in Weihui. Dimei must have heard about it.' Madame Ma suddenly raised her head. With a strange expression in her eyes, she said: 'Of course I know about it.' A'Zhu said: 'We all suspect that Qiao Feng killed him. After that, the three seniors Grandpa Tan, Granny Tan and Zhao Qiansun were also killed outside the city of Weihui. Then the Shan family of Impartial Judge in Tai'an,

Shandong was burned to the ground. Not long ago, while going to Jiangnan to investigate a matter involving a seven-bag disciple that violated the Society's rules, I received a message on the way that old monk Zhiguang of Zhiguan Temple on Mt. Tiantai had suddenly passed away too.' Madame Ma trembled all over and her face changed color, saying: 'This... This was also done by Qiao Feng?'

A'Zhu said: 'I personally went to Zhiguan Temple to investigate. Though I couldn't get any result, it's nine out of ten that it was a deed of this fellow Qiao Feng. I've expected that his next step will most likely be troubling you so I've hastily come here to advise dimei to take refuge somewhere else for about a year to avoid Qiao Feng's assault.'

With tears welling up in her eyes, Madame Ma said: 'Ever since Master Ma was unluckily murdered, it's become pointless for me to live on in this world. If that fellow surnamed Qiao wants to harm me, he'll be most welcome. Why the need to seek refuge somewhere else?'

A'Zhu said: 'Dimei (younger sis-in-law), why do you say that? Brother Ma hasn't been avenged and the murderer hasn't been captured. There's a heavy burden on you. Where's Brother Ma's memorial tablet? I should give a bow to him.'

Madame Ma said: 'I dare not accept the honor.' But still, she conducted the two of them to the rear hall. A'Zhu took a bow first then Xiao Feng respectfully kowtowed to the memorial tablet. Inwardly, he prayed: 'Big brother Ma, if you have supernatural powers after death, today you should induce your wife to say the name of the real murderer so that I can avenge you and get rid of the injustice you suffered.'

Madame Ma knelt down beside the memorial tablet to return the salute, tears rolling down on her cheeks. After kowtowing, Xiao Feng stood up. He saw that there were several elegiac couplets hung in the mourning hall, among which were the ones presented by Elder Xu and Elder Bai,

but the couplet he himself gave her was not hung here. The pieces of white cloth in the mourning hall had accumulated dust, adding to the gloomy atmosphere. Xiao Feng thought: 'Madame Ma has no child, there's only an aged maid servant beside her every day. It's really hard for her to pass the time during these lonely days.'

He heard A'Zhu console her with patronizing but tactful words such as 'Dimei, you should take care of yourself. Brother Ma's score is everyone's score. If you have any difficulty, just tell me, I'll certainly help you.' He secretly praised: 'This little girl's imitation is perfect. The Beggar Society's Chief was expelled, the Vice-Chief is dead, Elder Xu was murdered and the Elder of Merit Propagation was killed by me so Elder Bai now has the most revered position. The tone of a Chief that she uses in conversation really matches her status.' Madame Ma thanked A'Zhu but her tone sounded very cold. Xiao Feng felt worried. He saw that she was very bored and her expression was desolate, perhaps because her husband had passed away, she no longer had any joy in life. He was afraid that she might commit suicide to follow her husband. This woman had an unyielding temperament so she was capable of anything.

Madame Ma invited the two of them back to the guest hall. Before long, the aged maid servant set the table for dinner. There were four dishes, green cabbage, turnip, tofu and cucumber. All were vegetarian dishes. Also, there were three bowls of steaming hot cooked rice, but there was no wine. A'Zhu cast a look at Xiao Feng, thinking: 'No wine for you tonight.' Staying calm and collected, Xiao Feng lifted up a rice bowl and ate. Madame Ma said: 'After my late husband passed away, this widow has become a vegetarian. This isolated residence doesn't have meat, fish or wine, I'm sorry for treating the two of you in this cold manner.' A'Zhu sighed and said: 'Brother Ma has died and cannot come back to life. Dimei, you don't need to make yourself suffer.' Seeing that

Madame Ma was so loyal to her deceased husband, Xiao Feng exceedingly respected her.

After the dinner, Madame Ma said: 'Elder Bai, you came here from afar so I should ask you to stay. But it's inconvenient for a widow like me. I'm wondering if you still have something to instruct me.' Her tone hinted that she wanted the guests to leave. A'Zhu said: 'I come to Xinyang this time to advise dimei to leave your house to avoid danger. Do you have any plan?' Madame Ma let out a sigh and said: 'That fellow Qiao Feng murdered Master Ma. If he comes to kill me, it'll only be as good as ordering me to follow Master Ma to the Underworld. Even though I'm a weak woman, to tell you the truth, when I'm not afraid of even death, I'm not afraid of anything.' A'Zhu asked: 'Does that mean dimei is unwilling to take refuge somewhere else?' Madame Ma replied: 'Elder Bai, thank you very much for your kindness. This little woman is really unwilling to leave Master Ma's house.'

A'Zhu said: 'At first I wanted to stay around here for a few days to protect dimei; though I'm definitely no match for that fellow Qiao Feng, in case of emergency, I'd be able to lend a helping hand. But on the way I heard a very important secret message.'

Madame Ma said: 'Oh, it must be extremely important.' It goes without saying that women are always very curious, hence when hearing about an important secret, they will certainly be pleased to know about it even though it may have nothing to do with them; even if they say that they are not interested, their expression will always show that they really want to know. Who could have expected that Madame Ma's was still indifferent? It looked like it did not matter to her if A'Zhu said it or not because her husband was already dead, thus nothing in the world could stir up her mind. Xiao Feng thought: 'They always compare the heart of a widow to a withered plant or cold ash. That expression is best used with Madame Ma.'

A'Zhu waved to Xiao Feng, saying: 'You wait for me outside. I have some secrets to tell Madame Ma.'

Xiao Feng nodded and walked out of the house. He secretly praised A'Zhu's smartness because he knew that if one wanted other people to reveal their secrets, he must reveal his own secrets first to make them trust him. He understood that A'Zhu dismissed him because she wanted to earn Madame Ma's trust and to express that this matter was so secret that not even a trusted subordinate was allowed to hear.

He walked out of the main door. It was dark and quiet outside and he could only hear the vague tinkle coming from the kitchen. The aged maid servant was washing dishes. He immediately went around the corner of the house then squatted down beside the window of the guest hall and held his breath to listen. Even if Madame Ma did not say the name of that man, as long as she revealed some clues, he would still have something to investigate, which would be better than the present when he was totally at a loss. Moreover, this time Elder Bai had shown his kindness first by going thousands of li to give her an alarm, and when he was about to leave, he talked about an important secret matter, he was also the head of the Society so it was unlikely that Madame Ma would hide something from him.

Only after a long time did he hear Madame Ma sigh softly and ask in a quiet voice: 'You... Why do you come here again?' Afraid of spoiling the overall situation, Xiao Feng did not dare to rashly stick his head out to look into the guest hall through the window, but he felt surprised: 'What does she mean by this sentence?'

He heard A'Zhu reply: 'I really heard the message that Qiao Feng wanted to harm you so I come to tell you.' Madame Ma said: 'Oh, thank you very much for your kindness, Elder Bai.' A'Zhu lowered her voice and said: 'Dimei, ever since Brother Ma unfortunately passed away, some Elders of our Society have remembered his

contributions and wanted to invite you to come out of your seclusion to hold an Elder post.'

Hearing she talk in a very cordial manner, Xiao Feng could not help secretly laughing, but he praised that this was a very good idea because if Madame Ma accepted it, 'Elder Bai' would immediately become her superior, and then when he asked something, she would not be able to refuse to answer. Even if she did not accept to be an Elder, knowing that the Beggar Society had high regard for her, at the very least she would be happy for a while.

He heard Madame Ma say: 'What kind of virtue and ability do I have to be an Elder of our Society? I'm not even a disciple of the Society. The post of an Elder is too high for and too far away from me.' A'Zhu said: 'I and the people such as Elder Wu have done our utmost to recommend you. Everyone said that if Madame Ma also gave some ideas, it'd be much easier to capture Qiao Feng. I also got a very important message that is closely related to the murder of Brother Ma.' Madame Ma asked: 'Really?' Her voice still sounded rather indifferent.

A'Zhu replied: 'That day, at the memorial ceremony for Elder Xu in Weihui city, I met Zhao Qiansun. He mentioned a matter to me, saying that he knew who the real murderer of Brother Ma was.'

Suddenly there was a bang. A teacup had been broken into pieces. Madame Ma uttered an exclamation then continued saying: 'You... What are you joking about?' Her voice was extremely angry but it also sounded somewhat panicky.

A'Zhu said: 'This is a serious important matter, how can I be joking? That Zhao Qiansun really told me in person that he knew who actually killed brother Ma Dayuan. He said that it was definitely not Qiao Feng, nor the Murong Clan of Gusu, but he knew absolutely that it was another person.'

Madame Ma said in a quavering voice: 'How could he know? How could he know? You're talking nonsense. Isn't it



unreasonable?’

A'Zhu said: ‘It’s true. Don’t worry, I’m gonna slowly tell you. Zhao Qiansun said: ‘Last year, in the eighth month...’” When she had not yet finished, Madame Ma let out an ‘Ah’ sound of exclamation and passed out. A'Zhu hastily cried: ‘Dimei, dimei!’ and used force to press on the philtrum between her nose and her upper lip. Madame Ma slowly regained consciousness. She complained: ‘You... Why did you need to scare me?’

A'Zhu said: ‘I didn’t scare you. That Zhao Qiansun really said so. It’s a pity he’s already dead. Otherwise, I’d be able to call him here to testify. He said that on the mid-autumn day in the eighth month last year, Grandpa Tan, Granny Tan and that murderer of Brother Ma celebrated the festival together in the house of that ‘leading big brother’.’

Madame Ma uttered a sigh and asked: ‘Did he really say so?’

A'Zhu said: ‘Yes. I asked who the real murderer was but he said that it was inconvenient for him to say this person’s name. I went to ask Grandpa Tan. He angrily stared at me and didn’t say anything. Granny Tan said that it was totally correct and it was she who told Zhao Qiansun about it. I don’t blame Grandpa Tan for getting angry. He must’ve gotten mad because his wife told Zhao Qiansun everything. And Zhao Qiansun was unwilling to say the name of the murderer because he was afraid that he would get his old lover Granny Tan involved in this.’ Madame Ma asked: ‘Oh, so what?’

A'Zhu said: ‘Zhao Qiansun said, everyone suspected that Qiao Feng and Murong Fu killed Brother Ma but let the real murderer go unpunished and walk around at will, if Brother Ma knew about this in the Underworld, he would suffer a wrong and feel bitter about it.’ Madame Ma said: ‘Yes, it’s a pity that Zhao Qiansun is already dead. Grandpa Tan and Granny Tan didn’t tell you the truth, did they?’ A'Zhu replied: ‘They didn’t. When things have become like this, I

have no choice but to go ask the leading big brother.' Madame Ma said: 'Good. You should go ask him.' A'Zhu said: 'It's really laughable to say, but I don't know who this leading big brother is and where his house is.'

Madame Ma said: 'Oh, so you've beaten around the bush to tactfully ask me about the name of this leading big brother.'

A'Zhu said: 'If it's unsuitable, there's no need for dimei to tell me. I may think of a way to find out about him by myself. Then we'll find the real murderer and make him pay for his crimes.' Xiao Feng knew that A'Zhu was pretending that she did not care in order not to make Madame Ma suspect, but still, he could not help feeling exceedingly anxious.

He heard Madame Ma say indifferently: 'The name of this leading big brother certainly must be concealed from other people so that Qiao Feng wouldn't know about it and find him to avenge his parents' deaths. But Elder Bai is on our own side, why should I hide it from you? He is...' She lowered her voice while saying the words 'He is', then became silent.

Xiao Feng seemed to be able to hear even his own heartbeats but all along he did not hear Madame Ma say the name of that 'leading big brother'. After a long time, he heard her softly sigh and say: 'The Moon in the sky is so round, and so bright.' Xiao Feng knew clearly that the sky was being shrouded in dark clouds and there was no Moon, but he still looked up, thinking: 'Today is the second day of the month, even if there was a Moon, in no way would it be round. What does she mean by saying those words?' He heard A'Zhu say: 'On the fifteenth day, the Moon will naturally be both round and bright. Alas, but too bad brother Ma won't be able to see it again.' Madame Ma said: 'You like to eat salty moon cakes or sugary ones?' Xiao Feng found this even stranger, thinking: 'After the death of her husband, Madame Ma's mind has become somewhat dim.' A'Zhu said: 'We're beggars, how can we be picky in eating

moon cakes? If we couldn't find the real murderer and settle this big score for Brother Ma, not to mention moon cakes, even dainties of every kind wouldn't taste any good.'

Madame Ma remained silent, after a long while, she coldly said: 'Elder Bai wholeheartedly only wants to find the real murderer and avenge his brother Ma Dayuan. That makes this little woman feel very grateful.' A'Zhu said: 'It is what a person in my position should do. Who among the tens of thousands of the Beggar Society disciples doesn't think of settling this score?' Madame Ma said: 'This leading big brother has a revered position and a great reputation, and he can mobilize tens of thousands of people with a word. What he likes the most is sheltering his friends. If you go ask him who the real murderer is, he'll be unwilling to say regardless.'

Xiao Feng felt happy in his heart, thinking: 'Come what may, it's been a worthwhile trip to us. Even if Madame Ma doesn't say the name of that person, basing on this '... has a revered position and a great reputation, and he can mobilize tens of thousands of people with a word' sentence, I can always guess who he is. How many people are there in wulin having this kind of status?'

While he was pondering about who this man was, he heard A'Zhu say: 'Previously, in wulin, the Beggar Society's Chief could mobilize tens of thousands of people with a word. Oh, there're Shaolin disciples all over the world so the Abbot of Shaolin School can mobilize tens of thousands of people with a word too...' Madame Ma said: 'You don't need to guess carelessly. I'm gonna give you another clue. You must go southwest.' A'Zhu muttered to herself: 'Go southwest? Does the southwest have any VIP? It seems not.'

Madame Ma extended her finger and with a 'pai' sound she tore the window's paper, the hole was just above the top of Xiao Feng's head. He heard her follow that by saying: 'This little woman doesn't know martial arts. But Elder Bai, you must know who is the best at this skill under Heaven.'

A'Zhu said: 'Oh, this is an acupuncture point blocking skill, isn't it? The Diamond Finger of Shaolin School and the Soul Seizing Finger of the Zheng family in Cangzhou, Hebei are the most formidable ones.'

Xiao Feng cried in his mind: 'Wrong, wrong! Among acupuncture point blocking skills, the Purely Yang Finger of the Duan Clan in Dali is the number one under Heaven. Besides, she said the southwest.'

Sure enough, he heard Madame Ma say: 'Elder Bai is experienced and knowledgeable, how could you not guess correctly? Could it be that after your journey you've become so fatigued and woozy that you've forgotten even the famous Purely Yang Finger?' He tone was rather derisive.

A'Zhu said: 'Of course I know about the Purely Yang Finger of the Duan family, but the Duan Clan is the sovereign imperial clan in Dali, they haven't had any contact with the wulin of Central Plains for a long time. If you say that there's a connection between the leading big brother and them, it must be a false rumor.'

Madame Ma said: 'The Duan Clan has royal authority in Dali, but there's not only one person in the clan. The people who are not the Emperor have often visited Central Plains. This leading big brother is the younger full brother of the current emperor of Dali. His surname is Duan, and given name Zhengchun. He was conferred on with the title the South-Stabilizing Prince.'

Hearing Madame Ma say the three words 'Duan Zhengchun', Xiao Feng could not help shaking all over because finally he already knew the name which for the past several months he had rushed about thousands of li and tried his best to find out about.

He heard A'Zhu say: 'This Prince Duan has a revered status and a lot of power, how could he take part in the fighting and killings in Jianghu?' Madame Ma said: 'Of course Prince Duan disdains to get involved in the common fighting and killings in Jianghu. But if it was an important

matter that was related to the rise or fall, the existence or disappearance of Dali, do you think he would concern himself with it or not?' A'Zhu replied: 'Sure he would take part in it.' Madame Ma said: 'I heard Elder Xu said: Great Song is the northern wall of Dali, once the Khitan destroys Great Song, the second step would be nothing but swallowing up Dali. Because Great Song and Dali are closely related and mutually dependent like the lips and teeth, Dali is definitely unwilling to let Great Song be ruined at the hands of the Liao Empire.' A'Zhu said: 'Yes, your words are correct.'

Madame Ma said: 'Elder Xu said, that year, this Prince Duan was being a guest at the headquarters of the Beggar Society. While he and Chief Wang were drinking and discussing martial arts with each other, suddenly they heard that Khitan warriors were coming to Shaolin in great force to rob sutras. Because of his sense of honor, Prince Duan couldn't refuse to lead everybody and rush to the outside of Yanmen Pass to intercept them. In name, this deed of his was for the sake of Great Song, but in fact it was for the sake of Dali. I heard that at that time this Prince Duan was still young but he excelled in martial arts and was very benevolent and righteous. In Dali, he is below only one person and above all the others; he uses money as if it is dirt; other people don't need to open their mouths, he can conveniently give his friends hundreds or thousands of taels of silver. If he hadn't led the martial arts users of Central Plains then who, you think, would have? Someday in the future he'd become the Emperor of Dali. With such exalted status, and the others being ordinary people, how could they order him about?'

A'Zhu said: 'So the leading big brother is the South-Stabilizing Prince of Dali, and everyone would rather die than say his name only to protect him.' Madame Ma said: 'Elder Bai, you must not tell this secret to the second person. Prince Duan and our Society have a deep friendship, if this

information leaks out, there'll be a huge disaster. The Duan Clan wields great power in a region and is very formidable, but if Qiao Feng deliberately seeks revenge and waits in the dark for eight or ten years, it'll be hard for Duan Zhengchun to deal with him.'

A'Zhu said: 'Dimei, you're right. I'll keep my mouth shut like a bottle and in no way reveal it.' Madame Ma said: 'Elder Bai, it'd be best if you take an oath, so that I can be at ease.' A'Zhu said: 'All right. If Bai Shijing tells anyone else that Duan Zhengchun is the 'leading big brother', Bai Shijing shall suffer the disaster of ten thousand cuts and lose all reputation and become the laughing stock for the whole world.' Her oath sounded very serious but in fact she was very crafty and pushed everything to 'Bai Shijing'; the person who would suffer ten thousand cuts was Bai Shijing, the person who would lose all reputation was Bai Shijing, and it had nothing to do with A'Zhu herself.

Hearing that, Madame Ma seemed to be very pleased, saying: 'This's good.'

A'Zhu said: 'Then I'll go to Dali to pay a visit to the South-Stabilizing Prince then indirectly mention last year's Mid-Autumn Festival and ask about who were in his mansion at that time, then we'll be able to find out who really murdered Brother Ma. But at the moment, I still firmly believe that it's Qiao Feng. Zhao Qiansun, Grandpa Tan and Granny Tan are three dimwits. Their words aren't very dependable.'

Madame Ma said: 'Elder Bai, I beg of you to find out the truth about the murderer.' A'Zhu said: 'Brother Ma and I are just like full brothers. I'm certainly gonna do my utmost.' Her tears dripping down, Madame Ma said: 'Elder Bai is so serious about friendship. If my late husband could know about this in the Underworld, he would certainly be very grateful.' A'Zhu said: 'Dimei (younger sis-in-law), you take care of yourself. I take my leave.' After bidding farewell, she immediately went out. Madame Ma said: 'This little woman is a widow so it's unsuitable for me to see you off far. Elder Bai,

please forgive me.' A'Zhu said: 'That's fine, that's fine. Dimei doesn't need to stand on ceremony.'

After getting to the outside, A'Zhu saw Xiao Feng standing in waiting in the distance. The two of them exchanged a look then, silent as the grave, went straight along the road.

The crescent new moon shone on the road leading back to Xinyang. The two of them went side by side. Only after going ten li (0.5 km) or so did Xiao Feng let out a long breath and say: 'A'Zhu, thank you very much.'

A'Zhu smiled indifferently and did not say anything. Even though her face was full of wrinkles, and she was in disguise as Bai Shijing, from the look in her eyes, Xiao Feng still sensed that her mind was being filled with worries. He asked: 'Today we're highly successful, why aren't you happy?'

A'Zhu replied: 'I'm thinking that the Duan Clan in Dali has many people and great power, if you go there to get revenge by yourself, it'd be extremely dangerous.'

Xiao Feng said: 'Oh, so you're worrying about me. Don't worry. I'm in the dark and he's in the light. If I can't get revenge in three to five years, then just like what Madame Ma said, I'll wait for eight to ten years. There'll be one day when I'll chop Duan Zhengchun into seventeen or eighteen pieces to feed dogs.' Saying this, he could not help but grind his teeth, showing all the enmity that filled his bosom.

A'Zhu said: 'Big Brother, you must be careful.' Xiao Feng said: 'Of course I will. It's not important if I die, but if I can't avenge the deaths of my parents, I won't be able to die with my eyes closed.' He slowly stretched out his hand and pulled her hand, saying: 'If I die at the hands of Duan Zhengchun, who will pasture cattle and sheep with you outside Yanmen Pass?'

A'Zhu said: 'Alas, I'm always very worried, and I feel that there's something wrong in this matter. That Madame Ma,

that... Madame Ma, she looks so pure and noble, but when I saw her, somehow I felt scared and disgusted by her.'

Xiao Feng laughed and said: 'That woman is very smart and capable. You were afraid that she'd discover that you were in disguise so it was unavoidable that you felt scared.'

After the two of them had returned to the inn in Xinyang, Xiao Feng immediately ordered ten Jin (600 g) of wine to carouse to his heart's content. He continuously calculated in his mind how to get revenge. Thinking of the Duan Clan in Dali, he involuntarily recalled the new sworn brother Duan Yu and could not help shivering with fear. In a trance, he raised the wine bowl but did not drink, and the expression on his face greatly changed.

Thinking that he had detected something, A'Zhu looked around, but she did not see anything unusual so she asked in a low voice: 'Big Brother, what's wrong?' Startled, Xiao Feng said: 'No... nothing.' Then he raised the wine bowl and tossed it off. When the wine reached his throat, suddenly he choked and coughed, and spewed wine onto the clothes that covered his chest. His drinking capacity was rare in the world and his internal energy was profound so choking while drinking was something that had never happened. A'Zhu was secretly worried but it was unsuitable for her to ask much.

She did not know that while drinking Xiao Feng suddenly remembered the drinking contest between himself and Duan Yu in Wuxi city that day during which the opponent had used the high-level internal energy of the 'Six Meridians Divine Sword' to force the wine out through the fingers. Xiao Feng himself knew that he could not match this kind of extraordinary skill and internal energy. Duan Yu obviously did not understand martial arts yet his internal energy was already so unusual. As the leader of the Duan Clan in Dali, that big enemy Duan Zhengchun had to be ten times as good as Duan Yu, and so how could Xiao Feng get revenge for the deaths of his parents? He did not know the



adventures through which Duan Yu had coincidentally obtained his extraordinary skills and absorbed the internal energies of other people. In terms of internal energy alone, Duan Yu was already many times better than his father. As for the 'Six Meridians Divine Sword', at the present time, no one other than Duan Yu was capable of using them all. Both Xiao Feng and A'Zhu knew Duan Yu very well, but Duan was the national surname of Dali, just like the surname Zhao in Great Song, the national surname Li of Western Xia, and the national surname Yelu of Liao, hence there were tens of thousands of people with this surname, Duan Yu had never mentioned that he was a prince of Dali, and thus Xiao Feng and A'Zhu did not expect that he was a descendant of the Emperor.

Even though A'Zhu did not know what Xiao Feng was thinking in detail, she guessed that he was worrying about how to get revenge, so she said: 'Big Brother, getting revenge is an important matter and can't be done in one day. We should plan before taking action. Even if the enemies are numerous and we are few, if we can't win by force, don't tell me that we can't win by wits.'

Xiao Feng was happy, thinking that A'Zhu was sharp and crafty, really a great assistant, he immediately poured a bowl of wine, tossed it off and said: 'I won't live under the same sky with the enemy that killed my parents. To settle this score, there's no need to care about any custom and morality in Jianghu, and any means is usable regardless of its viciousness. That's right, if it's impossible to win by force, we'll beat him by strategy.'

A'Zhu continued: 'Big Brother, besides your parents, you must also avenge your foster parents Old Master Qiao and Old Madam Qiao, and your master Venerable (from now on I'm gonna translate dashi as Venerable) Xuan Ku.'

Xiao Feng held out his hand and gave the table a hit, saying loudly: 'Yes, there's not only one score, but many.'

A'Zhu said: 'When you learned martial arts from Venerable Xuan Ku in the past, you must have been still young, so you haven't learned all the profound internal energy techniques of Shaolin School. Otherwise, even if the Purely Yang Finger of the Duan Clan in Dali was more formidable, it wouldn't necessarily be superior to the 'Muscle Changing Sutra' (Yijin Jing) by Damo the Old Ancestor of Shaolin School. I once heard Old Master Murong discuss martial arts in the world, and he said that the most fearsome skill of the Duan Clan in Dali was not the Purely Yang Finger but something called 'Six Meridians Divine Sword'.'

Xiao Feng frowned, saying: 'Yes, Master Murong is a wizard in wulin, his words are really insightful. What I was worried about just now was not the Purely Yang Finger, but this Six Meridians Divine Sword.'

A'Zhu said: 'That day, while Old Master Murong and Mister Murong were discussing martial arts in the world, I stood on one side to pour tea and heard several sentences. Old Master Murong said: 'Each of the seventy two elite skills of Shaolin School has its own excellence, but to defeat the enemy and win the battle, only one skill is already enough, there's no need to use seventy two skills.'"

Xiao Feng nodded, saying: 'What Senior Murong discussed is very true.' A'Zhu continued: 'At that time, Mister Murong said: 'Yes, jiumu (maternal uncle's wife) Wang and biaomei (younger female cousin with different surname) like to boast that they know many martial arts in the world, but what's the use of being a jack of all trades and master of none?' Old Master Murong said: 'Speaking of the word 'master', it's easier said than done. In fact the only truly elite skill of Shaolin School is the 'Muscle Changing Sutra'. As long as this sutra is successfully practiced, any skill, no matter how ordinary it is, can become a marvel from rubbish in the hands of the user.'"

When a user had a good basis and a powerful internal energy, they would be able to unleash enormous power

despite using only ordinary stances. Xiao Feng certainly understood this matter deeply. That day when he fought the heroes at Juxian Manor, using just the 'Founder's Long Fist', a set of martial arts that was known to everyone, he was able to battle many heroes and brave fellows in the world and make all the first-class experts there helplessly admire him. Now, after hearing A'Zhu relate Master Murong's words, he could not refrain from drinking two big bowls of wine continuously and saying: 'He understood my heart, he understood my heart. It's a pity Master Murong already passed away. Otherwise, I'd definitely go to his manor to meet this wizard of the world.'

A'Zhu smiled charmingly, saying: 'When Old Master Murong was still alive, he never met any stranger, but you'd certainly be an exception.' Xiao Feng raised his head and smiled, knowing that the words 'you'd certainly be an exception' meant to say: 'You're my intimate darling so Master Murong naturally would regard you with special respect.' Seeing the look in his eyes, A'Zhu could not refrain from lowering her head. Her cheeks reddened, but in her young heart, she secretly felt happy.

Xiao Feng drank another bowl of wine and asked: 'Old Master Murong wasn't very old when he passed away, was he?' A'Zhu replied: 'Around fifty years old. He couldn't be considered old.' Xiao Feng said: 'Oh, with his profound internal energy, the age of fifty was when his martial arts reached the peak of perfection. How could he suddenly pass away?' A'Zhu shook her head, saying: 'The Old Master died from some illness. All of us didn't know anything. He died very quickly. In the morning he suddenly fell ill, and in the evening, the Young Master wailed loudly and came out to tell everyone that the Old Master had died.'

Xiao Feng said: 'Oh, I wonder what the violent illness he suffered is. What a pity, what a pity. What a pity Divine Doctor Xue wasn't around there at that time. Otherwise, you should've invited him at any rate, and he would've been

able to save Master Murong's life.' He had never been acquainted with the father and son of the Murong Clan, but after hearing other people mention their words, deeds and natures, he could not help but rather admire them. A'Zhu's connection with them made him feel closer to them and value them even more.

A'Zhu continued: 'That day Old Master Murong discussed the 'Muscle Changing Sutra' with the Young Master. He said: 'I've never seen the 'Muscle Changing Sutra' created by Damo the Old Ancestor, but judging from the way of martial arts, the great reputation that Shaolin School has enjoyed should come from this 'Muscle Changing Sutra.' It's impossible to say that those seventy two elite skills are not formidable, but it can't be said that you can become the leader of the world in martial arts thanks to them.' The Old Master specially warned the Young Master that he weren't allowed to be overconfident about the martial arts that had been handed down by their ancestors and to make light of Shaolin disciples, because when there was already this sutra in the monastery, maybe the talented bright monks would be able to master it.'

Xiao Feng nodded in approval, thinking: 'The Murong Clan of Gusu is famous in the whole world, yet they aren't arrogant. This is hard to come by.'

A'Zhu said: 'The Old Master also said that all his life he had looked at almost all martial arts under heaven but it was a pity he had never seen the sword manual of the Six Meridians Divine Sword of the Duan Clan in Dali and the 'Muscle Changing Sutra' of Shaolin School, and that was unavoidably a great regret of his life. Big Brother, Old Master Murong already mentioned these two martial arts in the same breath, guessing from this, if you want to deal with the 'Six Meridians Divine Sword' of the Duan Clan in Dali, it seems you must start with the 'Muscle Changing Sutra' of Shaolin School. If we can steal the 'Muscle Changing Sutra' from the Bodhi Institute of Shaolin Monastery and put effort

in practicing it for several years, then I think we wouldn't need to be worried about that 'Six Meridians Divine Sword' or Seven Meridians Demonic Saber.' As she said to here, her expression resembled a smile yet she was not smiling.

Xiao Feng rose, laughing and saying: 'Little imp... You... It turns out you...'

A'Zhu laughed and said: 'Big Brother, at first I stole this sutra to give to the Young Master, after reading it he would incinerate it in front of the Old Master's grave to fulfill his father's desire. Now I give it to you.' As she finished, she took out an oilcloth packet and put it in Xiao Feng's hand.

That night, Xiao Feng saw with his own eyes that she disguised as monk Zhi Qing and stole the sutra from the copper mirror in the Bodhi Institute, but he could never have expected that it was the secret internal energy manual 'Muscle Changing Sutra' of Shaolin School. When A'Zhu was captured by the extraordinary fellows at Juxian Manor, thinking that she was a female, they did not search her body; as for the high-level Shaolin monks such as Xuan Ji and Xuan Nan, even in their dreams, they could never have expected that the lost sutra of their monastery was on her body.

Xiao Feng shook his head and said: 'You took a huge risk and narrowly escaped death to steal this sutra from Shaolin Monastery with the original intention of giving it to Mister Murong. How can I seize it for myself?'

A'Zhu said: 'Big Brother, you're wrong about this.' Xiao Feng asked in surprise: 'How can I be wrong?' A'Zhu said: 'I stole this sutra all on my own and not because I received an order from Mister Murong. I can give it to anyone. Moreover, after you've read it, it still won't be late for us to give it to Mister Murong. You bear an absolutely irreconcilable grudge against the murderer of your parents. To get revenge, one can do any sinister, cruel, despicable or dirty thing. Why are you still fussy about borrowing a sutra to have a look?'

Hearing these words, Xiao Feng was awestruck and startled. He made a deep bow to her, saying: 'Xianmei (literally 'virtuous younger sis', affectionately calling a younger sis), you're right in criticizing me. How can a person who's dealing with important matters keep worrying about trivial things?'

A'Zhu puckered her lips and smiled, saying: 'As a Shaolin disciple, it's only reasonable for you to use Shaolin martial arts to avenge your enshi (kind master) Venerable Xuan Ku. What's wrong about it?'

Xiao Feng continuously commended her. He felt both grateful to her and happy. Wasting no time, he opened the oilcloth packet, and saw a booklet whose paper had turned yellow. There were several sinuous bizarre characters written on the cover of the booklet. He cried inwardly: 'No good!' When he turned to the first page, he saw that it was filled with words, but these words were crooked. Some had the shape of a circle, some had the shape of a hook, and he did not know any of them.

'A'yo,' uttered A'Zhu, and said: 'So it's totally in Sanskrit. What bad luck. I originally wanted to burn the sutra as a sacrifice to the Old Master. As a maid, I shouldn't read it before that, that's why after the sutra came to my hands, I've never dared to open and take a look at it. Alas, no wonder those monks let me steal their secret martial arts manual without paying any attention. It turns out no one understands the sutra...' As she finished, she let out a deep sigh, sounding exceedingly dispirited.

Xiao Feng consoled her: 'There's no need to worry too much about gain and loss.' Then he put the 'Muscle Changing Sutra' back into the packet and returned it to A'Zhu.

A'Zhu said: 'Isn't it the same if you keep it? Don't tell me that there's still difference between us?'

Xiao Feng smiled and put the packet in his bosom. He poured another big bowl of wine. When he was about to

drink again, suddenly he heard footsteps outside the door, then someone snarled loudly. Slightly surprised, Xiao Feng rushed out of the door. He saw a big fellow who was covered with blood from head to toe on the main street. The fellow was holding two broad axes and was brandishing them up and down chaotically.

## Chapter 22: A Pair of Starry Eyes

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The big fellow had a thick beard and a very powerful appearance, but the look in his eyes was chaotic and he was behaving like crazy. Obviously this was a madman. Xiao Feng saw that the pair of broad axes in his hands seemed to be made of pure steel and very heavy. When the man separated them, brought them together, attacked and defended with them, his movements were rather disciplined, and the defense at his front was excellent and strict, just like the style of a master. Xiao Feng was acquainted with very many people of wulin in Central Plains but he did not know this big fellow. He thought: 'This big fellow's skill in using axes is very outstanding. How come I've never heard of such a man?'

That man brandished his broad axes faster and faster, and repeatedly roared loudly: 'Quick, quick, quickly go and report to our Lord that the enemy has come.'

He was standing at a place where there were roads on all sides and was chopping horizontally and hacking vertically with his two shining axes so passersby certainly stayed away from him. Who dared come near him? Xiao Feng saw that he was having a hysterical expression and kept executing move after move with the axes. Gradually, he no longer had enough strength, but he desperately continued and only shouted: 'Brother Fu, quickly retreat! Don't care about me. It's important to report to our Lord.'

Xiao Feng thought: 'This man loyally protects his Lord. He's a brave man. But losing energy like this, he'll certainly suffer very serious internal injuries.' He walked up to that big fellow at once and said: 'Old chap, can I treat you to a cup of wine?'



The big fellow glowered at Xiao Feng then all of a sudden he shouted: 'Prime villain, don't harm my Lord!' As he finished, he raised the axes and brought them down towards Xiao Feng's head. Seeing that Xiao Feng was in an extremely dangerous situation, all the bystanders cried 'A'yo.'

Hearing the words 'prime villain' Xiao Feng was also startled: 'I and A'Zhu are looking for the prime villain to get revenge. So the enemy of this man is also a prime villain. Even though he calls him the prime villain, that man may not necessarily be the one that I and A'Zhu call the prime villain. Anyway, I'm gonna save him first then talk later.' He immediately moved straight forward and stretched out his hand to block an acupuncture point on the part of the ribs around his waist.

Strangely, even though this man had lost his sanity, his martial arts remained intact, so he turned the axe in his right hand around and tried to hit Xiao Feng directly in the lower abdomen with the handle. This move was very effective and clever. Were Xiao Feng not very many times better than the man in martial arts, he would be hit by him. He immediately stretched out his left hand, grabbed the handle of the axe and snatched it. Already very weary, how could that big fellow withstand that? His whole body shook, and at once he threw himself on Xiao Feng. Who would have expected that he would disregard his own life and want to perish together with his adversary?

Xiao Feng moved his right arm over and gripped that man. He slightly exerted his power and rendered him immobile. All of the idle men who were watching for fun on the street applauded when they saw Xiao Feng subdue the madman. Half dragging, half carrying, Xiao Feng took that big fellow in the main hall of the inn. He pushed him down on a seat and said: 'Old chap, drink first and talk later!' Then he ordered the bartender to fetch wine.

That big fellow fixed his eyes on Xiao Feng. Only after a good while did he ask: 'You... Are you a good person or a

villain?’

Xiao Feng was startled, not knowing what to reply.

A'Zhu laughed and said: ‘Of course he’s a good person. I’m a good person too. And you’re also a good person. We’re friends. We’ll go fight the prime villain together.’ The big fellow stared at her for a while then stared at Xiao Feng for a while. It seemed he both believed and did not believe them. After a short while, he said: ‘That... That prime villain?’ A'Zhu continued: ‘We’re friends, let’s fight the prime villain together!’

That big fellow suddenly rose and said loudly: ‘No, no! The prime villain is very formidable. Quick, quickly go report to the Lord and ask him to think of a way to hide. I’m gonna hold back the prime villain and you’re gonna report.’ As he finished speaking, he rose and grabbed the broad axes.

Xiao Feng stretched out his hand and pressed down on the man’s shoulder, saying: ‘Old chap, the prime villain hasn’t come. Who’s your Lord? Where is he?’

The big fellow shouted loudly: ‘Prime villain, come here, come here, come here, your father’s gonna fight you three hundred bouts. Don’t you dare harm our Lord?!’

Xiao Feng and A'Zhu exchanged a look, both being at the end of their wits. A'Zhu suddenly said loudly: ‘A’yo, no good. Let’s quickly go report to our Lord. Where is the Lord? Where has he gone to? We mustn’t let the prime villain find him.’

The big fellow said: ‘Yes, yes, you go report. He’s gone to the Square Bamboo Forest by the Little Mirror Lake. You... You quickly go the Square Bamboo Forest by the Little Mirror Lake to report to the Lord. Go, go!’ As he finished, he urged continuously, looking very anxious.

While Xiao Feng and A'Zhu were still uncertain about their plan, suddenly the bartender said: ‘Go to the Little Mirror Lake? It’s not gonna be a short journey.’ Hearing that there was really a place with the name ‘Little Mirror Lake’, Xiao Feng hurriedly asked: ‘Where is it? How far is it from here?’ That bartender replied: ‘If you ask other people, they

may not necessarily know. Luckily for you, you've asked me, the very right person. I'm a man from the area around the Little Mirror Lake. This is really as coincidental as you can get. You're totally lucky!'

Hearing him babbling on about irrelevant subjects, Xiao Feng stretched out his hand, gave the table a hit and said loudly: 'Quickly say, quickly say!' The bartender at first wanted to mooch a tip before saying, but after being thus frightened by Xiao Feng, he no longer dared keep other people guessing, saying: 'This master is so impatient, ha-ha, if it were not for you meeting me by chance, even if you were more impatient, it'd still be useless, right?' He wanted to make some complaints, but seeing that Xiao Feng was not having a nice expression, he said: 'The Little Mirror Lake is to the northwest of here. First you go straight west. After going seven and a half li (0.5 km), you'll see around ten big willow trees. Four trees each row. There're four rows in total. One times four equals four. Two times four equals eight. Three times four equals twelve. Four times four equals sixteen. There're sixteen willow trees altogether. Then you quickly go north. After going nine and a half li, you'll see a big bluestone bridge. You mustn't cross the bridge. It'll be a mistake if you cross it. I say you can't cross the bridge but you'll need to cross a bridge. But you can't cross that big bluestone bridge on the left-hand side. You must cross the small wooden bridge on the right-hand side. After crossing the small bridge, you go west for a while then go north for a while then go northwest for a while. In short, it won't go wrong if you follow that footpath. Going like this for twenty one and a half li, you'll see a big lake that looks like a mirror. It's the Little Mirror Lake. To get there from here, everyone says that it's forty li, but in fact it's only thirty eight and a half li. It's less than forty li.'

Xiao Feng was able to repress his temper to hear the bartender say till the end. A'Zhu said: 'This big brother said so clearly and plainly. One li is one coin. At first I wanted to

give you forty coins, but it'd be a little bit wrong. How about not giving you? But I must give you. One times eight equals eight. Two times eight equals sixteen. Three times eight equals twenty four. Four times eight equals thirty two. Five times eight equals forty. Forty li of road minus one and one-half li should be thirty eight and one-half li,' then she counted out thirty nine coins and ground the last coin on the blade of an axe, creating an imprint. Next she pressed it with two of her fingers. With a snap, the coin was broken in half. Then she gave the bartender thirty eight and one-half coins.

Xiao Feng could not help laughing, thinking: 'This young girl is always up to mischief whenever she's got a chance.'

The big fellow was still glaring at them and repeatedly urged: 'Go report, quick. There's no time for delay. The prime villain is very formidable.' Xiao Feng asked: 'Who's your Lord?' The big fellow mumbled: 'My Lord... my Lord... he.... I mustn't tell other people where he is. You'd better not go.' Xiao Feng said loudly: 'What's your surname?' The big fellow replied thoughtlessly: 'My surname is Gu. A'yo, My surname isn't Gu.'

Xiao Feng became suspicious: 'Could it be that this man is playing some trick and deliberately lures me into going to the Little Mirror Lake? Why is he both surnamed Gu and not surnamed Gu?' He had another thought: 'If the enemy sends him to trick me into going, I'll most welcome it. I'm about to go find him. Even if the Little Mirror Lake is as dangerous as a dragon's pool or a tiger's den, what's there for me to fear?' He turned to A'Zhu and said: 'Let's go to the Little Mirror Lake to have a look and see if something happens. If this brother's Lord is there, I think we'll find him.'

That bartender cut in: 'There's only a wilderness around the Little Mirror Lake, nothing to see. If you two want to go sightseeing and widen your knowledge, I guarantee that the pavilions, terraces and towers in the gardens of the rich families here will greatly expand your horizons...' Xiao Feng waved his hand and told him to stop blabbering on. Then he

turned to the big fellow and said: 'Old chap, you're very tired, just rest here a little. I'm gonna report to your honored Lord on your behalf that the prime villain will come in no time.'

That big fellow said: 'Thanks a lot, thanks a lot! I, Gu, sincerely appreciate it. I'll stop the prime villain. I mustn't let him pass.' As he finished, he stood up and stretched out his hands to lift the broad axes, but his strength had been used up and his two arms were numb and aching, so after taking fast hold of the handles, he was unable to lift the axes up.

'Have a rest, old chap,' said Xiao Feng. After paying for the wine and the rent, he and A'Zhu went out of the door. Following the words of the bartender, they went westward along the main road. After going seven or eight li, as expected, they saw four rows of trees on the roadside. There were sixteen big willow trees in total. A'Zhu laughed and said: 'That bartender is talkative, but there're good things in his garrulousness. Like this, we definitely won't go wrong, right? Oh, who's there?'

She extended her finger and pointed to a willow tree. A peasant was sitting under the tree by leaning against it. His feet were being immersed in the muddy water in the ditch beside the tree. This should be just a common scene in the countryside, but one side of the peasant's face was being covered with blood, and on his shoulder was resting on a glittering staff which was made of refined copper and did not seem to be light.

Xiao Feng walked up to that peasant and noticed that he was breathing heavily. Obviously he had suffered serious internal injuries. Xiao Feng came straight to the point, asking: 'Big Brother, a broad-axe wielding friend entrusted us with the mission of going to the Little Mirror Lake and delivering a message. May I ask if the Little Mirror Lake is on this side?' That peasant raised his head, asking: 'Is the broad-axe wielding friend dead or alive?' Xiao Feng replied: 'He only exhausted his power. There's no big problem.' The

peasant let out a sigh of relief and said: 'Thank Heavens and Earth. You two please go north. I'll definitely never forget this kindness of delivering the message.' Judging from the way the peasant talked, Xiao Feng knew that he was no common peasant in the countryside, so he asked: 'May I ask your respected surname? What is the broad-axe wielding friend to you?' That peasant replied: 'My surname is Fu. Sir, please go quickly to the Little Mirror Lake. That prime villain already rushed past here. It's a shame that I couldn't hold him back.'

Xiao Feng thought: 'This man's serious injury really isn't false. If this is the enemy's plan to trick me, he must've spent a big amount of money.' Seeing the honest appearance of the man, Xiao Feng took a liking to him. He said: 'Big brother Fu, your injury is serious. What weapon did the prime villain use to harm you?' That man replied: 'It's an iron staff.'

Seeing fresh blood oozing unceasingly from his chest, Xiao Feng unfastened his clothes to take a look. He saw a hole in the man's chest. Even though the hole was not bigger than a fingertip, it was very deep. Xiao Feng extended his finger and blocked several important acupuncture points around the wound to help the peasant stop bleeding and reduce his pain. A'Zhu torn the front of his robe and bandage his wound.

That man with the surname Fu said: 'I can't repay you two for this great debt of gratitude with words. I only hope you would go to the Little Mirror Lake as quickly as possible and report to my humble Lord.' Xiao Feng asked: 'What's the name of your honored Lord? How does he look like?'

That man said: 'Sir, when you reach the side of the Little Mirror Lake, you'll see a bamboo forest to the west of it. All the bamboo trees are square. There're several bamboo houses in the forest. Please call out some words from the outside of the houses: 'The number one villain under Heaven has come. Hide quickly!' That'll be okay. It'd be best

if you don't enter the houses. As for the name of my humble Lord, someday in the future I, Fu, will certainly inform you.'

Xiao Feng thought: 'Who's the number one villain under Heaven? Could it be that he's Duan Yanqing of the 'Four Arch-Villains'? Judging from the words of this man, obviously he's unwilling to say so there's no need to ask him more.' However, this time he was no longer on the alert. He thought: 'If the enemies want to trick me into advancing, of course every sentence would sound reasonable. They definitely wouldn't make me suspect. This man hesitates in speech and is unwilling to say the truth so he doesn't have any ill will.' He then said: 'Alright. I'm gonna follow your instructions.' That big fellow struggled to crawl up then knelt down to express his gratitude.

Xiao Feng said: 'You and I feel like old friends at the first meeting. Brother Fu doesn't need to be excessively courteous.' He raised the man up with his right hand. Then he gave his own face a wipe with his left hand, removing the make-up, and met him with his true face, saying: 'I'm Xiao Feng, a Khitan. We'll meet again some day.' Without waiting for the man to say anything, he held A'Zhu's hand and went with quick steps.

A'Zhu asked: 'So we don't need to disguise and make up anymore?' Xiao Feng replied: 'I don't know why, but I like this straightforward big fellow very much. I wanted to make friend with him, so I couldn't meet him with a false face.'

A'Zhu said: 'Alright, I'm gonna revert to wearing female clothes as well.' She went to the side of a brook and hurriedly washed the make-up off her face. Then she took off her hat, revealing her black hair, and removed her baggy robe, showing the original female clothes inside.

The two of them went nine and a half li without taking a break. They saw a lofty bluestone bridge in the distance. When they came near the bridge, they only saw a scholar bending down on the surface of it. This man had spread a large sheet of white paper on the bridge, and using the

bluestone of the bridge as inkstone he had prepared a big puddle of ink. The scholar was holding the brush in his hand and was writing on the paper. Xiao Feng and A'Zhu found it strange. Who could have expected that someone would take paper, ink, brush and inkstone to a bridge in the wilderness to write?

Only when they got near him did they see that he really was not writing, but drawing. What he was drawing was the scenery around. The small bridge, the running water, the old trees and the distant mountains all could be found in the picture. He was bending down on the bridge and was not facing Xiao Feng and A'Zhu, but what strange was that the scenery in the picture was obviously directed towards the two of them. They saw that every stroke of his was executed in the opposite way to normal and he was drawing contrariwise.

Xiao Feng did not understand painting and calligraphy at all but A'Zhu had lived in Mister Murong's home for a long time and had seen a great many excellent works of painting and calligraphy. She saw that even though the 'inverse drawing technique' of that scholar could not be considered superb, it was really hard to draw in reverse like this. When she was about to go forwards to ask him several sentences, Xiao Feng lightly pulled a corner of her gown, shook his head and walk towards the small bridge on the left-hand side.

That scholar asked: 'Why didn't you two pay any attention when seeing me drawing in reverse? Could it be that this trifling skill of mine has defiled the eyes of you two?' A'Zhu replied: 'Confucius did not take a seat on an askew mat and did not eat irregular meat. An upright gentleman doesn't see 'inverse drawing'.' 'Ha-ha!' That man loudly laughed and withdrew the sheet of white paper, saying: 'Right on, please cross the bridge.'

Xiao Feng had already guessed what the scholar's intentions were. He had spread the sheet of white paper on



the bridge to catch other people's eyes. Firstly, he wanted to delay them. And secondly, he wanted to make what was false look like the true one, deliberately tricking other people into crossing the bluestone bridge. So Xiao Feng said: 'We want to go to the Little Mirror Lake. If we stepped on the bluestone bridge, we would go the wrong way.' That scholar said: 'If you follow the bluestone bridge, it'll merely be going around in a circle. After going an extra fifty or sixty li, you'll still arrive. The two of you had better go up the bluestone bridge.' Xiao Feng said: 'When everything is all right, why go an extra fifty or sixty li?' That scholar laughed and said: 'More haste and less speed. Could it be that you don't understand the reason behind this sentence?'

A'Zhu also realized that this scholar was intentionally delaying them. She stopped bothering herself with him and immediately stepped on the wooden bridge. Xiao Feng followed her. When the two of them got to the middle of the bridge, suddenly they felt that the board of the bridge under their feet was rather weak, with ka-la-la sounds it snapped, and their bodies fell downwards the river. Xiao Feng stretched out his left hand and gripped A'Zhu's body by the waist. His right foot slightly pressed on the board. Thus making use of it, he leaped forward and arrived at the other shore. After that, he sent a palm attack backwards in case the enemy sneakily attacked from behind.

'Ha-ha,' the scholar laughed loudly and said: 'Good skill, good skill! Why are you two quickly going to the Little Mirror Lake?'

Noticing that there was panic in his laughter, Xiao Feng thought: 'This man looks handsome and refined, yet he's on the prime villain's side.' He paid no attention to him and went forwards with A'Zhu without delay.

After going several zhang (1 zhang = 3.333 m), he heard footsteps at his back and turned his head around to take a look. It was none other than the scholar who was catching up from behind. Xiao Feng turned around and asked with a

darkened face: 'Sir, what do you want to instruct me?' That scholar replied: 'I also want to go to the Little Mirror Lake. It just so happens that I and you two have the same journey.' Xiao Feng said: 'This can't be better,' then put his left hand on A'Zhu's waist. Raising his internal energy, he took her along and went as if floating. His movements were really smooth and noiseless and did not stir up even light dust. The scholar quickly rushed after Xiao Feng but the distance between them became farther and farther. Seeing that his martial arts were mediocre, Xiao Feng did not care about him anymore. He continued raising his internal energy and going as if floating. Even though he was taking A'Zhu along, he was still much faster than the scholar. Within the time to finish a meal, Xiao Feng already left the scholar far behind himself and did not see any trace of him anymore.

After crossing the small wooden bridge, the path became very narrow. Sometimes the grass was as high as the waist and it was very hard to recognize the path. If the bartender had not said clearly, Xiao Feng would really have had a hard time finding this path. After going for less than one hour, he saw a clear lake. Xiao Feng slowed down and went up to the lake. He saw that its water was blue like jade and its surface was calm like a mirror. It was really worthy of the three words the 'Little Mirror Lake.'

When Xiao Feng was about to look for the Square Bamboo Forest, suddenly he heard two sounds of chuckling in a thicket of flowers on the left of the lake, then a stone flew out. Looking in the flying direction of the stone, Xiao Feng saw a fisherman who was wearing a large bamboo hat and was fishing beside the lake. His fishing rod had just lifted up a black carp when that stone arrived. Without the least bit of inaccuracy, the stone hit the fishing line squarely. A 'chi' sound was heard, the fishing line was broken in two and the black carp fell back into the lake.

Xiao Feng was secretly startled: 'The power of this person's hand is very strange. The fishing line is soft and

isn't affected by blunt force. There's nothing unusual if missiles such as flying knife and sleeve-hidden arrow are used to cut it off. But obviously it was a round stone. Who could have expected that the fishing line would be broken? This person's Yin soft skill in using missiles definitely doesn't belong to Central Plains.' The person who had thrown the stone did not seem to possess high-level martial arts, but they had an air of intense evil. It was simply an unorthodox technique. Xiao Feng thought: 'This is probably a subordinate of that prime villain. Judging from the laughter, this person seems to be a young girl.'

That fisherman was also startled when his fishing line was broken. He said loudly and clearly: 'Who played a trick on surnamed Chu, me? Please show yourself.'

With several se-se sounds, the thicket of flowers was split apart and a young girl came out. She was dressed in all-purple clothes and was only fifteen or sixteen years old. Compared to A'Zhu, she was still younger by a few years. She had a pair of big shiny black eyes and her face was full of mischievousness. As soon as she saw A'Zhu, she ignored the fisherman, skipped up to her, pulled her hand, laughed and said: 'This zizi (older sister) will be very pretty when grown-up. I like you very much!' She sounded somewhat tongue-tied when saying, and her pronunciation was not correct, just like a foreigner who had just started to learn the language of Central Plains.

Seeing that the young girl was lively and innocent, A'Zhu laughed and said: 'It's just you who'll be pretty when grown-up. I like you even more.' A'Zhu had lived in Gusu for a long time, and now she was talking in Mandarin of the Middle Land (Henan). Therefore, even though she sounded gentle and lovely, her pronunciation was also not very accurate.

The fisherman at first was about to get mad. But seeing that the young girl was so lively and lovely, the anger that was filling his bosom disappeared. He said: 'This girl is so

naughty. But the technique that you used to break the fishing line is very good.'

That young girl said: 'What's so interesting about angling? It's boring to death. If you wanna eat fish, wouldn't using this fishing rod to jab at the fish be better?' As she finished, she received the fishing rod in the hand of the fisherman and conveniently gave the water a poke. The tip of the fishing rod pierced through the abdomen of a fish. When the fishing rod was lifted up, the fish was still writhing and twisting. From the wound, fresh blood fell into the green water drop after drop. The red and the green served as foils to each other, looking bright and beautiful, but there was also cruelty in the beauty of the colors.

Xiao Feng saw that when she executed this convenient poke, first her right hand slightly bent to the left, then drew a small arc and thrust out from the right side. This move was rather clever and undoubtedly pleasing to the eye. However, if she used it to attack and defend when facing an enemy, she would be a little late. Xiao Feng was really unable to guess what school or family possessed this martial arts technique.

That young girl continuously lifted the rod up and thrust it down. She pierced through six black carps and white fish in a row, creating a chain of fish on the rod. Then she gave it a shake, flinging all the fish into the lake. With a displeased expression on his face, the fisherman said: 'You're a very young girl, yet you act so cruelly. If you want to catch fish, then that's fine. But you stabbed dead the fish not for food. Why did you kill them for no reason?'

The young girl clapped her hands, laughed and said: 'I like killing for no reason. What do you wanna do?' Then she exerted herself to break the fishing rod in two with both hands. Oddly, this fishing rod was very tough and firm, and the young girl was unable to bend it. That fisherman sneered: 'You want to snap my fishing rod? It's not so easy.'

That young girl pointed to the back of the fisherman, saying: 'Who's coming?'

The fisherman turned his head around to have a look, but he saw no one. Knowing that he had been fooled, he hastily turned his head back, but he was already a little late. He only saw his fishing rod fly off more than ten zhang (3.333 m) then, with a 'chi' sound, pass into the center of the lake and disappear without a trace at once. Furious, the fisherman shouted loudly: 'Where are you from, brat?' and stretched out his hand and to grab her shoulder.

The young girl laughed and said: 'Help me! Help me!' and hid at the back of Xiao Feng. The fisherman jinked sideways to come and catch her. His movements were light and neat. In a glance, Xiao Feng saw that there was an object in the hand of the young girl's. It seemed to be a transparent cloth and was indistinct. Xiao Feng did not know what it was. The fisherman rushed at her, but somehow he suddenly slipped and threw himself on the ground. After that, his body became a heap. Only now was Xiao Feng able to see clearly that what the young girl was having in her hand was a sheet of exceedingly thin silk fishing net. The silk threads were as thin as hair, and they were also transparent, yet they were exceptionally tough and pliable. Moreover, when they came into contact with something, they immediately contracted. In the fishing net, the more the fisherman struggled, the tighter it became. In a short while, he become a cylindrical glutinous rice cake and was wrapped around by the net to the point of being immovable.

The fisherman cursed loudly and severely: 'Brat, what dirty trick are you playing? What are you plotting by using evil techniques to capture me like this?'

Inwardly, Xiao Feng was astonished. He knew that the girl really was not using any evil technique, but this fishing net was rather evil indeed.

The fisherman kept cursing loudly. That young girl laughed and said: 'If you curse another sentence, I'll hit you

in the buttocks.' The fisherman was startled and stopped talking at once. His face has swollen to a deep red.

At that time, in the west of the lake, someone said from a distance: 'Brother Chu, what happened?' Then a person went out along the lakeside path with quick steps. Xiao Feng saw that this man had a rectangular face and was between forty and fifty years old. He was mighty in appearance, but was wearing rather rakish and informal attire consisting of a light robe and a loose belt.

This man came near. Seeing the fisherman being bound, he was very surprised, so he asked: 'What happened?' The fisherman replied: 'This little girl used evil techniques...' The middle-aged man turned his head and looked at A'Zhu. That young girl laughed and said: 'Not her. It's me!' The middle-aged man uttered an exclamation of doubt then stooped down, lifted the huge body of the fisherman up and stretched out his hand to pull at the fishing net. Who would have known that the threads of the net had a very strange nature? The more force he used to pull, the tighter the fishing net became. And so, no matter what the middle-aged man did, he was unable to untie it.

That young girl laughed and said: 'If you say to me 'Miss, I've lost to you!' three times in a row, I'll set him free.' The middle-aged man said: 'You have offended my brother Chu. This won't have any good result.' The young girl said laughingly: 'Really? I just don't want any good result. The worse the result is, the more interesting it will be.'

The middle-aged man held out his left hand to grab her shoulder. The young girl suddenly slightly fell back and jinked towards one side to dodge. Unexpectedly, even though her movements were fast, that man was even faster. He slightly lowered his hand and caught her shoulder.

The young girl tilted her shoulder to get rid of his power, but the left palm of this middle-aged man seemed to have been firmly fixed to her shoulder. The young girl scolded in a sulky voice: 'Let go of me!' She waved her fist to hit him, but

before the fist had gone one chi (33.33 cm), her arm became powerless and drooped down weakly. Very astonished, the girl cried: 'What evil technique are you using? Quickly let go of me.' The middle-aged man smiled, saying: 'If you say 'Master, I've lost to you' three times in a row then untie the fishing net around my brother's body, I'll let you go.' The young girl said angrily: 'You've offended me. This won't have any good result.' The middle-aged man smiled, saying: 'The worse the result it, the more interesting it will be.'

The young girl again exerted all her strength to struggle, but she was unable to get free, and contrary to her expectations, her whole body ached and became weak. Even her feet did not have any strength. She laughed and said: 'How shameless. You can only copy other people's words. Alright, I'm gonna say to you. 'Master, I've lost to you! Master, I've lost to you! Master, I've lost to you!'" She did not pronounce the syllable 'mæs' of the word 'master' clearly and pronounced it as 'bæs' instead, therefore it sounded like she said 'Bastard, I've lost to you (The two words in the original are 贱 - xian1sheng5 - master, and 畜 - chu4sheng5 - beast).' The middle-aged man did not notice it. He raised his palm and let go of her shoulder, saying: 'Untie the fishing net, quick.'

The young girl laughed and said: 'This can't be easier.' Then she went to the side of the fisherman and bent down to untie the fishing net around him. She slightly raised her left hand at the opening of the sleeve and a dark green flash was fired at the middle-aged man.

'Ah,' A'Zhu cried in fear because she saw that the missile firing technique of the young girl was very vicious. Moreover, the girl and the middle-aged man were just a small distance apart so it appeared that it was impossible for the missiles to miss him. But Xiao Feng only smiled slightly. Seeing that this middle-aged man tamed the young girl as soon as he showed his skill, Xiao Feng knew clearly that his internal energy was profound and his martial arts were

excellent, therefore these petty missiles naturally would not be able to harm him. Sure enough, the middle-aged man swung the sleeve of his robe and sent out a stream of internal energy which pushed all the cluster of green thin needles aside. The needles then stuck in the mud beside the lake, one after another.

Seeing the color of the thin needles, the middle-aged man knew at once that they had been suffused with an extremely fierce poison. As soon as this poison got into the blood of a victim, their throat would be blocked and they would die instantly. This was the first time he and she had met each other, and there was no enmity between them, why did she use such a vicious move? The man got angry and wanted to teach this kid a lesson. He waved his right sleeve. The force of the sleeve contained his palm force. With a 'hu' sound, the body of that young girl was lifted up, and with a 'pu' sound, she fell into the lake. Following that, the man slightly pressed the tips of his feet on the ground and jumped onto a rowboat under a willow tree. Holding the oars and pushing it several times, he reached the place where that young girl had just fallen down. Now, he only waited for her to emerge to grab her hair and lift her up.

But when that young girl fell into the water, she only uttered an 'A'yo!' sound. After she had fallen into the lake, no trace of her could be seen at this point. Naturally, when a person is drowning, they will definitely emerge and submerge a few times, and only after drinking water to the full will they no longer resurface. However, that young girl was like a big piece of stone, and thus she sank without rising. The middle-aged man waited for a short while, but all along the girl did not rise to the surface.

The more the man waited, the more worried he became. In fact he had no intention of harming her. It was just that seeing that she was very young yet her actions were so malicious, he wanted to discipline her once. If she was drowned, he would feel deeply sorry for her. That fisherman



had excellent skills in swimming, so he should have been able to get into the water and save her. Unfortunately, he was being wrapped around by the fishing net and thus being unable to move. Both Xiao Feng and A'Zhu did not know how to swim so they did not know what to do either. They heard the middle-aged man call loudly: 'A'Xing, A'Xing! Come out, quick!'

From a distant bamboo thicket, the calls of a woman were heard: 'What happened? I won't come out!'

Xiao Feng thought: 'This woman's voice sounds flirtatious. But it has three-tenths of stubbornness. I'm afraid she's the naughty type. She, A'Zhu and the young girl that fell into the lake would be like the legs of a tripod cauldron.'

That middle-aged man called: 'There's a drowning person. Quickly come to the rescue.' That woman called: 'Were you drowned?' The middle-aged man called: 'Don't joke. If I were drowned, how can I be talking to you? Quickly come to the rescue!' That woman called: 'If you were drowned, I'd come to save you instantly. But if someone else is drowned, I'd love to see and have a jolly time!' The middle-aged man asked: 'Will you come or not?' and repeatedly stamped his feet at the prow of the boat, looking exceedingly anxious. That woman said: 'If that's a man, I'll save him at once. But if that's a woman, even if one hundred women died, I'd only clap my hands and cheer. I definitely won't save her.' The voice sounded closer and closer. In a short while, she already got to the side of the lake.

Xiao Feng and A'Zhu looked at her and saw that she was wearing a greenish swimsuit which clung to her body, making her delicate waist become more obvious. She had a pair of big shiny black eyes which were brilliant and sparkling like stars. The look in her eyes was very lively and nimble. It seemed as if with a pair of eyes alone she was already capable of speech. The woman was beautiful, and the corners of her mouth resembled a smile without smiling. She was around thirty five or thirty six years old. When Xiao

Feng had heard her voice and tone before, he had only thought that she had been twenty one or twenty two years old at most. He could never have expected that she would be a woman who was not very young at all. The swimsuit on her body was worn neatly. Perhaps when hearing that middle-aged man call her to the rescue, she had at once changed clothes. And while she had been teasing him, making him worried, she had changed clothes very fast.

Seeing that she had come, the middle-aged man was totally happy, saying: 'A'Xing, quickly, quickly, I accidentally threw her into the lake. I could never have expected that she wouldn't resurface.' That beautiful woman said: 'I'm gonna ask clearly first. If that's a man, I'll save him right away. But if that's a woman, then you'd better not say anything.'

Both Xiao Feng and A'Zhu found this very strange, thinking: 'There're women who are unwilling to get into the water to save men to avoid embracing or getting entangled with them underwater, thus losing their own dignity. Why is this woman the exact opposite, only saving men and not women?'

The middle-aged man stamped his feet, saying: 'Oh dear! She's just a fourteen or fifteen year old little girl. Don't be suspicious.' The beautiful woman said: 'Humph, a little girl, so what? To a man like you, a fourteen or fifteen year old little girl and a seventy or eighty year old aged woman both will be...' She at first wanted to say 'both will be accepted', but in a glance, she saw Xiao Feng and A'Zhu, so she slightly blushed and stretched out her hand and covered her own mouth, and the word 'accepted' was withdrawn at once, but her eyes were filled with amusement.

The middle-aged man took a deep bow at the prow of the boat, saying: 'A'Xing, please save her quickly. I'll follow everything that you say.' That beautiful woman asked: 'You'll really follow me in everything?' The middle-aged man hastily replied: 'Yes. Oh, this little girl hasn't resurfaced.'

Could it be that she has really died...?' The beautiful woman said: 'If I ask you to stay here forever, will you also follow me?' An awkward expression appeared on the face of the middle-aged man. He said: 'This... this...' The beautiful woman said: 'Even if you said without keeping your words and only sweet talked to make me happy for a short while, it'd be good enough for me. Yet you're unwilling to do even such a thing.' When she said to here, her eyes reddened and her voice was somewhat choked with emotion.

Xiao Feng and A'Zhu looked at each other. Both of them found this strange. This man and this woman were no longer young, but their words and actions were the same as those of passionate young lovers. Also, they did not look like a husband and a wife, especially that woman, for in front of strangers she was still showing no restraint in conversation, and while the life of a stranger was hanging by a thread, she was still talking about these matters of no urgency.

The middle-aged man let out a sigh and rowed the rowboat back, saying: 'Forget it, forget it. There's no need to save her. This little girl used poisonous missiles to sneakily attack me. She deserves to die. Let's go back!'

That woman tilted her head, saying: 'Why no need to save her? I'll still save her. She shot missiles at you, right? That's very good. Why didn't she shoot you dead? What a pity, what a pity!' She giggled then suddenly jumped up and plunged into the lake. Her skills in swimming were really outstanding. With a soft 'chi' sound, and without causing water to fly up into the air, she got to the bottom of the lake. After that, a 'ka-la' sound was heard when the surface of the lake disintegrated. The beautiful woman was already holding that purple-gowned young girl in her hands and her head emerged from the water. The middle-aged man exulted. He hastily rowed the rowboat back to pick them up.

After the middle-aged man had come near the beautiful woman, he stretched out his hands to receive the purple-gowned young girl. Seeing that her eyes were closed tightly

and that she did not seem to be breathing, he could not help having a concerned expression. The beautiful woman shouted: 'Don't touch her. You're a lady-killer, very unreliable.' The middle-aged man feigned anger, saying: 'Nonsense. In my life, I've never been a lady-killer.'

The beautiful woman uttered a sound of sneering, then holding the young girl in her hands, she jumped in the boat. She laughed and said: 'Right, right. You've never been a lady-killer, and you're only fond of very ugly women like Wuyan, Mo Mu (two very ugly women according to legend). A'yo...' She touched that young girl's chest, and to her surprise, she immediately noticed that the girl's heart had already stopped beating. Needless to say, her breathing had ceased for a long time. But her belly was not bulging so obviously she had not drunk much water.

Familiar with swimming, the beautiful woman at first had thought that being under water for such a little while would not kill the girl. Never could she have expected that this young girl was physically delicate and would die. She could not help looking rather apologetic. She carried the young girl in her arms and disembarked, saying: 'Quickly, quickly! We must find a way to save her!' Then, carrying the young girl, she ran very quickly towards the bamboo forest.

The middle-aged man bent down, lifted the fisherman up then turned to Xiao Feng and said: 'Brother, may I ask your exalted name, and the noble purpose of your arrival at this place?'

Seeing that he had a natural and graceful bearing and that despite the young girl's tragic death, he was still so imperturbable, Xiao Feng secretly admired him. He replied: 'I am Xiao Feng, a Khitan. I was entrusted by two friends with the task of going here to pass on a message.'

Of course there was no one in Jianghu who did not know the name Qiao Feng, but he already knew his real surname so at this moment he called himself Xiao Feng, and adding the two words 'a Khitan', he had stated his own origin

straight out. The middle-aged man was undoubtedly very unfamiliar with the name Xiao Feng. Hearing the words 'a Khitan', he was not surprised in the least either. He asked: 'Who are the two friends that requested brother Xiao to do this? And what is the message that you are delivering?' Xiao Feng replied: 'One wields a pair of broad axes. The other wields a copper staff and calls himself surnamed Fu. Both of them are injured...'

Frightened, the middle-aged man asked: 'How are the injuries of these two? Where are they now? Brother Xiao, these two people are my close brothers. Sorry to trouble you, but could you give me directions? I... I... must go save them at once.' The fisherman said: 'Please take me with you.' Seeing that they valued righteousness, Xiao Feng admired them in his heart, saying: 'The injuries of these two people are serious but their lives ain't in danger. They're in the town over there...' That middle-aged man took a deep bow, saying: 'Thank you very much! Thank you very much!' Then, without saying anymore, he lifted the fisherman up and started to go towards the path along which Xiao Feng had come.

Right at this moment, they heard the calls of that beautiful woman coming from the inside of the bamboo forest: 'Quickly come here, quickly come here. You come and see... see what this is!' Her voice sounded exceptionally panic-stricken.

The middle-aged man stopped going. While he was hesitating, suddenly he saw a man quickly running towards them on the path and calling: 'My Lord, did someone come to make trouble?' He was none other than the scholar who had drawn in reverse on the bluestone bridge. Xiao Feng thought: 'I thought he was trying to stop me from passing on the message. But it turns out he and those broad axe user and copper staff user are on the same side. The person that they call 'the Lord' is this middle-aged man, then.'

At this moment, the scholar had already noticed Xiao Feng and A'Zhu. Seeing the two of them standing beside the middle-aged man, he could not refrain from being startled. When he came near them, seeing that the fisherman was being bound, he was both shocked and angry. He asked: 'What... what happened?'

They heard the voice of the beautiful woman inside the bamboo forest become more panic-stricken: 'Why haven't you come? A'yo, I... I...'

That middle-aged man said: 'I go have a look.' Then he lifted the fisherman up and walked quickly towards the bamboo forest. As soon as he moved, anyone could see at once that he had an extraordinary internal energy. His steps were light and long, yet they were exceptionally fast. Xiao Feng put one hand on A'Zhu's waist then he went alongside him at an appropriate speed. The middle-aged man cast a look at Xiao Feng. An admiring expression was visible on his face.

They arrived at the bamboo forest in an instant. Sure enough, each of the bamboo trees was square. After going several zhang (3.333 m) into the bamboo forest, they saw three small houses with bamboo roofs. The structure of the houses was very delicate.

Hearing footsteps, the beautiful woman rushed out, crying: 'You... you quickly come and see. What is this?' She was holding a gold lock in her hand.

Xiao Feng saw that this gold lock was a common piece of jewelry for women and there was nothing special or unusual about it. That day, when A'Zhu was injured, Xiao Feng took vulnerary out from her bosom and saw a gold lock which looked almost the same as this lock. Strangely, when the middle-aged man looked at the gold lock several times, his face changed colors greatly at once. He asked in a quavering voice: 'Where... where did you get this?'

The beautiful woman replied: 'I took it from her neck. I once drew a mark on their left shoulders. You... you go and

see yourself...' As she finished, she wept without being able to make any sound.

The middle-aged man quickly rushed into the house. A'Zhu also slightly shook her body and rushed in. She was even a step ahead of the beautiful woman. Xiao Feng followed behind that woman to go straight to the inner room. He saw that it was the bedchamber of a woman with delicate and elegant furnishings. Xiao Feng had no time to scan but he saw that purple-gowned young girl lying flat on the bed, stiff and motionless. She was already dead.

The middle-aged man pulled the sleeve of the young girl up and looked carefully at her shoulder. After taking a look, he immediately pulled the sleeve down. Xiao Feng was standing at his back so he did not see what the mark on the shoulder of the young girl was. He only saw that the back of the middle-aged man was continuously trembling. Obviously his mind was in a state of extreme discomposure.

The beautiful woman grabbed the middle-aged man's robe and wept, saying: 'She's your own daughter, yet you killed her with your own hands. You didn't bring her up yet you killed her... You... you're such a heartless father...'

Xiao Feng was very astonished: 'What? This young girl is their daughter? Ah, that's right. Probably not long after giving birth to this young girl, they put her under a fosterage elsewhere. Both this gold lock and the mark on the left shoulder are the marks of identification that her parents left her.' Suddenly he saw tears streaming down A'Zhu's face and her body shaking slightly and leaning towards the bed.

Xiao Feng was frightened. He hurriedly held out his hand to support her. When he stooped down, he saw the eyeballs of the young girl lying on the bed slightly move. She already closed her eyes but the movements of her eyeballs could still be seen behind the eyelids. Caring about A'Zhu, Xiao Feng only asked: 'What's wrong?' A'Zhu stood up straight, wiped the tears and said with a forced laugh: 'I saw that

this... this girl had an unfortunate tragic death so I feel sorry for her.'

Xiao Feng stretched out his hand and felt the pulse of the young girl. That beautiful woman wept, saying: 'The heart already stopped. The breathing has already gone too. You can't save her life.' Xiao Feng slightly channeled his internal energy, pushed it on the wrist of the young girl then immediately loosened his grip. He felt an opposing stream of internal energy emerge in the body of that young girl. Obviously she was channeling her internal energy to resist.

'Ha-ha,' Xiao Feng laughed loudly and said: 'It's really rare to see such a naughty girl in the world.' That beautiful woman said angrily: 'Who are you? Quickly get out of here! My daughter has died. What nonsense are you talking here?' Xiao Feng laughed and said: 'What if I can bring your dead daughter back to life?' Then he stretched out his hand and thrust at an acupuncture point on the waist of the young girl.

This finger attack hit the 'Jingmen acupuncture point' on the waist of the young girl. This point is at the end of the last rib of the human body. Xiao Feng passed his internal energy into the acupuncture point, immediately making the girl feel unbearably tingly and itchy. Unable to endure that, the young girl jumped up on the bed, giggled in a lovely manner and reached for Xiao Feng's shoulder with her left hand to support herself.

Seeing the girl come back to life from death, all the people in the room were both surprised and happy. The middle-aged man laughed and said: 'So you scared me...' The beautiful woman smiled through tears and cried: 'My miserable daughter!' and expanded her arms to embrace her.

Inexplicably, Xiao Feng hit the young girl with the back of his hand, sending her falling. After that, he held out his hand, grabbed her left wrist, sneered and said: 'So young, yet so vicious!'



The beautiful woman cried: 'Why did you hit my daughter?' If she had not had regard for Xiao Feng's status as the person who had 'revived' her daughter, she would have fought him at once.

After grabbing her wrist, Xiao Feng turned her palm over, saying: 'Please see.'

Everyone saw that the young girl was holding a glistening green thin needle in a space between her fingers. At first sight, they already knew that the needle had been suffused with an intense poison. Pretending to reach for Xiao Feng's shoulder to support herself, she wanted to stick this thin needle in his body. Fortunately, he had sharp eyes and was nimble, therefore he was not caught in her snare, but it was really an extremely dangerous situation.

This palm attack only made one cheek of the young girl's swell up considerably. Xiao Feng certainly did not use all his power. Otherwise her skull would have been shattered into small pieces easily. With her wrist being gripped, it was already too late for her to hide the poisonous needle even if she wanted to. Moreover, the left side of her body was being powerless, aching and tingling. Suddenly, her small mouth twitched slightly and she wept loudly, crying: 'You bully me! You bully me!'

The middle-aged man said: 'Alright, alright! Don't cry! He just gave you a gentle hit. What's the big deal? Frequently using intensely poisonous missiles to harm other people, you should be taught a lesson.'

The young girl wept, saying: 'This Green Phosphorous Needle of mine isn't the scariest. I still have very many unused missiles.'

Xiao Feng said coldly: 'Why didn't you use the Invisible Dust, the Carefree Powder, the Blissful Thorn, or the Heart Piercing Nail?'

The young girl stopped crying. There was an extremely surprised expression on her face. She asked in a quavering voice: 'You... How do you know?'

Xiao Feng replied: 'I know your master is the Old Fiend of Xingxiu (Xingxiu = Constellation. This is a school name and a place name so I use the pinyin) so I know you have lots of evil poisonous missiles.'

As soon as he said so, everyone was shocked. The 'Old Fiend of Xingxiu' Ding Chunqiu was an unorthodox expert that everyone in wulin would frown when they heard his name. This man stopped at nothing in doing evil and killed people like flies. His 'Energy Dissolving Great Technique' was specially developed for destroying other people's internal energies so it was an even greater taboo to martial arts learners under Heaven. Unfortunately, his martial arts were extremely good therefore no one had been able to do anything about him. All in all, it was only because he had seldom come to Central Plains that he had not yet become a catastrophe.

The expression of the middle-aged man's was both sympathetic and worried. He asked in a warm voice: 'A'Zi, why did you accept the Old Fiend of Xingxiu as your master?'

With her big round shiny black eyes wide open, the young girl sized up that middle-aged man, asking: 'How do you know my name?' The middle-aged man sighed and said: 'Could it be that you didn't hear what we talked just now?' The young girl shook her head and smiled, saying: 'When I play possum, my heart and breathing are stopped, and my eyes and ears are closed, so I can't see or hear anything.'

Xiao Feng let go of her wrist and said: 'Humph, it's the 'Chelonian Breathing Skill' of the Old Fiend of Xingxiu.' The young girl A'Zi goggled at him, saying: 'Bah! It seems you know everything.' Then she stuck out her tongue and made a face.

The beautiful woman pulled A'Zi and looked her up and down. Her face was being radiant with ineffable happiness. The middle-aged man smiled, saying: 'Why did you play possum? You really made us jump out of our skin.' A'Zi was

very pleased with herself, saying: 'Who told you to throw me into the lake? You're not a good guy.' The middle-aged man looked at Xiao Feng then, with an awkward expression, he forced a smile and said: 'So stubborn, so stubborn.'

Xiao Feng knew that when he and his daughter met each other for the first time, they would certainly have many things to say--things that they could not let strangers hear. Therefore he pulled a corner of A'Zhu's gown and walked outside into the bamboo forest. He saw that A'Zhu's eyes had become reddish and her body was shaking continuously. So he asked: 'A'Zhu, are you sick?' and stretched out his hand and felt her pulse, only to find that it was beating very fast. Obviously her mind was being in great turmoil. A'Zhu shook her head, saying: 'It's nothing.' Presently, she said: 'Big Brother, please go out first, I... I need to go to the toilet.' Xiao Feng nodded and walked far away.

Xiao Feng walked to the side of the lake and waited here for quite a while, but all along he did not see A'Zhu come out from the bamboo forest. Suddenly he heard footsteps. Three people were coming at a trotting speed. A thought emerged in his mind: 'Could it be it's the prime villain coming?' From a distance he only saw three people rushing along the path beside the lake. Two of them were carrying someone on each of their backs, and a short and small fellow was going as if flying. When rushing, it seemed as if his feet did not touch the ground. After rushing away for a distance, he stopped to wait for his companions at the back. Those two people had solid steps. It was obvious that their martial arts were rather remarkable. When the three people had drawn near, Xiao Feng saw that the two fellows being carried on the back of others' were none other than the people they had met on the way--the mad axe user and the big fellow with the surname Fu. He heard the short and small fellow shout: 'My Lord, my Lord, the prime villain has caught up. We should run quickly!'

Leading the beautiful woman with one hand, and leading A'Zi with the other hand, the middle-aged man walked out from the bamboo forest. There were tear stains on the face of the middle-aged man and the beautiful woman, but A'Zi was grinning complacently as if nothing had happened. After that, A'Zhu also walked out from the bamboo forest then went to the side of Xiao Feng.

That middle-aged man let go of the two females he was leading, rushed to the side of the two wounded fellows and checked their pulses. Seeing that their lives were definitely not in danger, he had a joyful look on his face at once, saying: 'You three have gone through hardships. I'm just feeling at ease that both Brother Gu and Brother Fu have no big problem.' The three people bowed in salute in an exceedingly respectful and cautious manner.

Xiao Feng was inwardly surprised: 'These three people's martial arts and bearing are really out of the ordinary. Even if they aren't lords who wield absolute power in a region, they can easily be the heads of some schools, but why are they so respectful when seeing this middle-aged man? What is his background?'

That short fellow said: 'My Lord, this subject has set up a diversion beside the bluestone bridge to hold back the prime villain. But I'm afraid he will see through the stratagem at once. Please set off forthwith, my Lord.' The middle-aged man said: 'It's unfortunate for my family to have produced such an evil rebel. Since you and he have met each other here, I'm afraid even if I want to avoid him I won't be able to. Perhaps I'll have no choice but to try to deal with him once.' A fellow with thick eyebrows and big eyes said: 'Your subjects are going to share the task of resisting the enemy and eliminating evil among ourselves. Please attach most importance to the country and quickly return to Dali so as not to make His Majesty concerned about your welfare, my Lord.' A fellow of middling size said: 'My Lord, you should not display your temporary valor in dealing

with today's matter. If you make any slight slip, my Lord, how shall we have the face to return to Dali and meet His Majesty? We shall have no choice but to commit suicide together.'

Hearing up to here, Xiao Feng was slightly scared: 'What is with all these subjects, His Majesty, and return-to-Dali things? Could it be that they're from the House of Duan in Dali?' His heart pounding chaotically, he thought: 'Could it be that the net of Heaven are vast and today that villain Duan Zhengchun will fall into my hands by chance?'

While he was being doubtful, suddenly he heard a long roar in the distance. After that, there were shouts which sounded like metals being ground against each other: 'The son of a turtle (~ s.o.b) surnamed Duan, you can't escape. Be obedient and be tied, quick. Maybe your father here will have some consideration for your son and spare your life.'

The voice of a woman was heard: 'But Yue the Third you won't have the chance to decide if his life will be spared or not. Don't tell me that big bro won't be able to handle him?' A sinister-sounding voice said: 'If this surnamed Duan fellow knows right and wrong, that'll always be more convenient than not.' This man was trying hard to send his words far away. He obviously did not have enough energy in his stomach. It seemed he had been injured and had not yet healed.

Hearing these people say 'surnamed Duan' again and again, Xiao Feng felt even more suspicious. Suddenly, a small hand was stretched over, and held his hand. Xiao Feng cast a sideways look at A'Zhu who was standing at his side. He saw that her face was pale, and the center of her palm was full of ice-cold sweat, so he asked in a low voice: 'How are you?' A'Zhu replied in a quavering voice: 'I'm very afraid.' Xiao Feng smiled, saying: 'Beside your Big Brother, what are you still afraid of?' With his mouth slightly protruding in the direction of the middle-aged man, he said softly into her ear: 'It seems this man is from the House of

Duan in Dali.' A'Zhu made no comment, her lips moving slightly.

The middle-aged man was Duan Zhengchun, the Crown Brother (No idea what the English equivalent of 皇兄 is) of the State of Dali. In his youth he traveled Central Plains and enjoyed the pursuit of romance so it was unavoidable that he had relationships everywhere. In fact, it was common for the rich and the people of high social status to have three or four wives. Duan Zhengchun was a prince, so it was also normal for him to have romantic relationships with many people. But the House of Duan originated from a well-known family in Central Plains. Even though they had become the sovereign power in Dali, they had always followed the teachings of their ancestors in all daily life matters and in eating and drinking. Never had they dared forget their origin and be overly lavish. Duan Zhengchun's first wife, Lady Dao Baifeng, was the daughter of a powerful Baiyi headman in Yunnan. The House of Duan married one of their sons to her in order to win over the Baiyi, thus strengthening their imperial throne. There were not many Han people in Yunnan at that time, therefore, without the support of the Baiyi the throne of the Duan clan would not be stable. The Baiyi had always practiced monogamy. Being held in high regard since childhood, Dao Baifeng was even more unwilling to let Duan Zhengchun marry the second wife. Because of his never-ending romantic relationships everywhere, she was so angry that she entered into religion and became a Taoist priestess. In the past, Duan Zhengchun had a love story with each of the three women Qin Hongmian--Mu Wanqing's mother, Gan Baobao--Zhong Wanchou's wife, and Ruan Xingzhu--A'Zi's mother.

This time, Duan Zhengchun complied with an order of his brother Emperor to go to Shenjie Temple in Luliangzhou to investigate the circumstances of the murder of Venerable Xuan Bei of Shaolin Monastery. He discovered very many doubtful points, and thought that it might not be the

murderous work of the Murong Clan of Gusu. But no high-level Shaolin came there for more than half a month, so he took the three Dukes Fan Hua, Hua Hegen and Ba Tianshi, as well as the four Grand Bodyguards, to Central Plains to find out about the truth. Making use of the opportunity, he paid Ruan Xingzhu, who was living in seclusion beside the Little Mirror Lake, a visit. And in these days, they were always in each other's company and were happy like immortals.

When Duan Zhengchun and his old flame rekindled their love, the three Dukes and the four Bodyguards, who came along to protect him, scattered all around to guard. They could never have thought that their archenemy would successfully find and come to this place.

Duan Yanqing's martial arts were formidable hence Gu Ducheng and Fu Sigui of the four Grand Bodyguards were successively injured. Zhu Danchen mistook Xiao Feng for their enemy and failed to stop him at the bluestone bridge. As for Chu Wanli, he was being caught in A'Zi's Flexible Silk Net. After rescuing the two people Gu and Fu, the Minister of War Fan Hua, the Minister of Education Hua Hegen and the Minister of Works Ba Tianshi quickly went to Duan Zhengchun to protect him and ward off the strong enemy together.

Zhu Danchen continuously tried to unloose the fishing net that was wrapping around Chu Wanli. This net, however, could not be untied with hands and nor could its threads be damaged by knives. Zhu Danchen had been so busy with it that he had sweated all over, yet he still had no way that worked. Duan Zhengchun turned to A'Zi, saying: 'Release uncle Chu, quickly. The archenemy is coming. Don't be naughty anymore.' A'Zi laughed and said: 'What will you reward me with, Dad?' Duan Zhengchun frowned, saying: 'If you don't listen to me, I'll ask your mother to beat your palms. You've offended uncle Chu. Why haven't you made amends?' A'Zi said: 'You threw me into the lake, making me

play possum for a long time. Why haven't you made amends to me? I'll ask Mom to beat your palms, too!'

Seeing that the South-Stabilizing Prince suddenly had another daughter who not only was arrogant and naughty but also was not in the least well-behaved towards her father, the people such as Fan Hua and Ba Tianshi were secretly on the alert, thinking: 'This girl isn't a legitimate child at all, but she's still South-Stabilizing Prince's daughter. Even if she offends me, I shouldn't take her seriously and should only think that it's bad luck. Being tied by her in this way, brother Chu must find it very hard to endure.'

Duan Zhengchun said angrily: 'If you don't listen to Dad, see if later I'll be fond of you or not?' A'Zi twitched her small mouth and said: 'Of course you're not fond of me. Otherwise, how could you abandon me for ten-odd years and ignore me all along?' For a short period of time, Duan Zhengchun was unable to say anything and only sighed sadly. Ruan Xingzhu said: 'A'Zi, my precious, Mom has something for you. You quickly release uncle Chu.' A'Zi held out her hand, saying: 'You give me first. Let me see if it's good or not.'

Seeing that this little girl was cunning, discourteous and insolent, Xiao Feng was very angry. In his heart, he respected Chu Wanli for being a brave fellow, thinking: 'You're a servant of their family so you don't dare express your emotions. But I don't need to show respect for them.' Then he bent down and lifted Chu Wanli up, saying: 'Brother Chu, it seems these flexible threads will loosen at once when touching water. I'm gonna immerse you in water.'

A'Zi was furious, crying: 'Bad egg, who told you to be meddlesome again!?' But having been given a slap in the face by Xiao Feng, she was rather afraid of him and did not dare stretch out her hands to stop him.

After lifting Chu Wanli up, with several steps, Xiao Feng rushed to the side of the lake and immersed him in the water. As expected, the Flexible Silk Net loosened up when



coming into contact with the water. Xiao Feng held out his hand and untied the fishing net. Chu Wanli said in a low voice: 'Thanks a lot for helping me, Brother Xiao.' Xiao Feng smiled, saying: 'This naughty little girl is very hard to deal with. I already gave her a heavy slap in the face to vent your anger for you.' Chu Wanli shook his head, looking very dispirited.

Xiao Feng crumpled the Flexible Silk Net up into a piece which was not bigger than a fist. The net was really an unusual thing. A'Zi came near him, held out her hand and said: 'Give it back to me!' Xiao Feng slightly waved his hand, assuming a posture which looked as if he wanted to hit her. A'Zi was so frightened that she retreated several steps. But Xiao Feng only wanted to scare her. He then took the opportunity to put the Flexible Silk Net in his bosom. He thought that the middle-aged man in front of him was probably his own archenemy, and that A'Zi was the man's daughter and this Flexible Silk Net was a useful thing so he certainly should not return it to her.

A'Zi went to Duan Zhengchun and pulled a corner of his robe, saying: 'Dad, he stole my fishing net! He stole my fishing net!' Duan Zhengchun saw that Xiao Feng had acted unusually, but he thought that he probably wanted to discipline A'Zi a little, and that he had such outstanding martial arts so it was very unlikely that he coveted an object of a child's.

Suddenly, Ba Tianshi said loudly and clearly: 'Brother Yun, I trust that you've been well since we parted? Other people's martial arts become stronger and stronger through practice, why have brother Yun's become worse and worse? Get down!' As he finished saying, he brandished his hand and hit a tree. With a crack, a branch fell down following his palm attack. And at the same time, a man fell down. This man was both thin and tall. He was none other than 'Extreme Ferocity Utmost Evil' Yun Zhonghe. After being hit by a palm attack of Xiao Feng at Juxian Manor, he had been

seriously injured and almost lost his life. With great difficulty, he had recuperated, but his martial arts had become much worse than before. That day in Dali, he and Ba Tianshi had had a lightness skill contest and they had not been far apart. However, today, as soon as Ba Tianshi heard the footsteps of Yun Zhonghe when he went up the tree, he knew that his lightness skill was not as good as it had been in the past.

As soon as Yun Zhonghe saw Xiao Feng, he was frightened, so he turned around and ran to meet three people who were coming along the path beside the lake. Among those three people, the one on the left-hand side had disheveled hair and short clothes--he was the 'Fiendish Devil' South Sea Divine Alligator. The one on the right-hand side was a woman who was embracing a child--she was 'Stop at No Evil' Ye Erniang. The one in the middle was wearing a green robe and was supporting himself on two thin iron canes and his face looked like a corpse's--he was none other than the leader of the four Evils, known as 'Full of the Worst Evils' Duan Yanqing.

Duan Yanqing had seldom showed his face in Central Plains so Xiao Feng and the 'Number one Arch-Villain under Heaven' were not at all acquainted with each other. However, Duan Zhengchun had experienced his artifice in Dali, so he knew that even though the ones such as Ye Erniang and Yue the Third were powerful, they were not hard to handle, but Duan Yanqing was really no small matter. He had strong techniques of both the orthodox system and the heterodox system of martial arts. Without doubt he was proficient at the Purely Yang Finger of the Duan family, and he had also mastered unorthodox skills from head to toe, orthodoxy and heterodoxy boosting each other. Not even such an expert as Yellow-Eyebrowed Monk was a match for him, so Duan Zhengchun certainly knew that he himself was not his equal in martial arts.

Fan Hua said loudly: 'My Lord, this Duan Yanqing is up to no good. You should attach most importance to the country, My Lord. Please quickly go and request high-level monks of Tianlong Monastery to come here.' Tianlong Monastery was far way in Dali, how was it possible to request them to come? At present, the Lord and the servants of Dali were being faced with a deadly great danger, so those words were meant to request Duan Zhengchun to quickly flee back to Dali at once. At the same time, they were a false show of strength and might make Duan Yanqing think that high-level monks of Tianlong Monastery were nearby, thus becoming somewhat afraid of them. Duan Yanqing was of the direct line of descent of the Duan Clan so he certainly knew very well that the monks of Tianlong Monastery were redoubtable.

Duan Zhengchun knew clearly that the situation was extremely dangerous, but among the people of Dali here he had the best martial arts, if he abandoned the others and retreated, how would he still have the face to see the heroes under Heaven? Moreover, his lover and daughter were around, how could he lose face like that? So, he smiled, saying: 'A matter of the Duan Clan in Dali, yet we have to go to Great Song to settle, ha-ha, so laughable, so laughable.'

Ye Erniang laughed and said: 'Duan Zhengchun, every time I see you, you're always together with some loose and attractive women, both old and young. Your bliss ain't bad, eh?' Duan Zhengchun smiled, saying: 'YE Erniang, you're also very loose and attractive!'

South Sea Divine Alligator said angrily: 'This son of a turtle has enjoyed enough happiness. He has a son, but the dude's unwilling to accept me as master. He can't be a father. Let this father here cut him down at one stroke!' Then he drew out from his side the Alligator-Mouthed Scissors and rushed at Duan Zhengchun.

Hearing Ye Erniang call the middle-aged man Duan Zhengchun and him admit it without concealing anything,

Xiao Feng was sure that he had guessed correctly. He turned to A'Zhu and said in a low voice: 'It's really him!' A'Zhu said in a trembling voice: 'You want to... launch a joint attack from the side, taking advantage of his precarious situation?' Xiao Feng's mind had been fired up. He was both angry and pleased, saying coldly: 'My parents' wrongs, my benevolent master's wrong, my adopted father and mother's wrongs, and the wrongs I've suffered, humph, such knots of intense and deep-seated hatred. Humph, could it be that we'll still be paying attention to virtue, morality and jianghu customs?' He said these few sentences very softly but his face was full of enmity, looking resolute and decisive as if chopping nails and cutting iron.

Seeing South Sea Divine Alligator charge up, Fan Hua said in a low voice: 'Big brother Hua, dear brother Zhu, you two attack this lout jointly! Hit him fast and hard. The faster you beat him the better. Eliminate the accomplices first then everyone will cooperate to handle the boss.' Hua Hegen and Zhu Danchen replied in agreement and came out. They felt that there was a loss of dignity in using two people to fight one enemy. Furthermore, Hua Hegen's martial arts were not inferior to South Sea Divine Alligator's, so it was unnecessary for someone to help him. But hearing Fan Hua say so, both of them also felt that his words were reasonable. Duan Yanqing was really too formidable. In one-on-one combat, no one could be a match for him, so there was no alternative for them but to rush at him at the same time. Perhaps only then would they be able to defend themselves. Without delay, Hua Hegen grasped his steel shovel and Zhu Danchen brandished his iron brushes and attacked South Sea Divine Alligator from the left and the right in a pincer movement.

Fan Hua continued: 'Brother Ba, you go fight your old friend. I and brother Chu handle that woman.' Ba Tianshi replied in agreement, came out and rushed at Yun Zhonghe. Fan Hua and Zhu Wanli also jumped forward in pairs at once.

The original weapon of Chu Wanli's was an iron fishing rod, but it had been thrown into the lake by A'Zi, so in this moment he was raising Fu Sigui's copper staff. He shouted loudly and rushed up.

Fan Hua went straight at Ye Erniang. Ye Erniang gave a charming smile. Seeing Fan Hua's movements, she knew that he was a strong opponent, so she did not dare to be careless in dealing with him. She threw the baby she was embracing on the ground. When she turned around, there was already a saber which was both broad and thin in her hand. But no one could have known where she had hidden it previously.

Chu Wanli, however, rushed at Duan Yanqing, shouting like crazy. Fan Hua was very frightened, calling: 'Brother Chu, brother Chu, come to this side!' It seemed Chu Wanli did not hear anything. He raised the copper staff and ferociously swung it horizontally at Duan Yanqing.

Duan Yanqing sneered slightly. Amazingly, he did not dodge, but thrust at Chu Wanli's face with the iron cane in his left hand. This stance is mentioned lightly on paper, but it was executed without the least bit of inaccuracy in timing and position. Compared to the move of the staff of Chu Wanli's, it arrived just a little faster. Coming out later but arriving earlier, it was no doubt swift and fierce. Besides its neutralizing purpose, this stance was also for attacking, so it should be impossible for Chu Wanli not to dodge. In one stance, Duan Yanqing had reversed the positions of the host and the guest. However, who would have thought that Chu Wanli would not seem to see the coming iron staff? He put more power in his hands and kept swinging the copper staff at Duan Yanqing's waist swiftly. Duan Yanqing was scared, thinking: 'Could it be that this fellow is mad?' He was unwilling to become entangled with Chu Wanli in a situation that would see both sides injured. Even if he could poke him to death on the spot with this stance, his own waist would be hit by the staff and he would certainly be injured. So he

hastily pushed his right cane against the ground, jumped up and dodged.

Chu Wanli quickly put the copper staff up and thrust at his lower abdomen. This copper staff of Fu Sigui's was thick, long and heavy, so steadiness was the criterion for judging the martial arts of a user of it. But speed and lightness were the strong points of Chu Wanli's martial arts, so he had difficulties in using this copper staff. However, he brandished it in a disorderly manner with every move aimed for a vital part of Duan Yanqing's and gave absolutely no thought to his own life and death. 'A desperado bests ten thousand fellows,' as the saying goes. Even though Duan Yanqing had powerful martial arts, when facing this madman who fought recklessly with no regard for his life, he was forced to retreat again and again.

In a very short time, the green lawn beside the Little Mirror Lake was already splattered all over with fresh blood. It turned out while retreating Duan Yanqing had executed his stances continuously. Each of his stances had hit Chu Wanli's body and pierced a hole in the place where it had hit. However, Chu Wanli did not seem to be in pain and kept brandishing the copper staff faster.

Duan Zhengchun called: 'Brother Chu, fall back. I'm gonna fight this villain!' He moved his hand backwards and received a long sword from Ruan Xingzhu's hand. Then he rushed up, wanting to fight Duan Yanqing in a two-on-one. Chu Wanli cried: 'Fall back, my Lord.' But Duan Zhengchun would be unwilling to listen. He put the sword up then thrust at Duan Yanqing. Duan Yanqing, propping his right cane on the ground, first blocked Chu Wanli's copper staff with his left cane, then taking advantage of the opportunity he thrust at the place between Duan Zhengchun's eyebrows. Duan Zhengchun retreated one step in a sloping direction.

Chu Wanli, sounding like a wounded beast, suddenly changed his offence. He grasped one end of the copper staff with both hands, brandished it at high speed, creating a

circle of yellow light which looked like a huge copper tray, and whirled it towards the iron cane that Duan Yanqing was propping on the ground. Such a way of fighting was not any martial arts technique.

The people such as Fan Hua, Hua Hegen and Zhu Danchen all shouted loudly: 'Brother Chu, Big Brother Chu, quickly fall back to have a rest.' Chu Wanli, screaming out, suddenly jumped up and thrust and whipped at Duan Yanqing chaotically with the staff. At this moment, seeing that his actions were bizarre, everyone, from Fan Hua to Ye Erniang and South Sea Divine Alligator, stopped fighting. Zhu Danchen called: 'Big Brother Chu, move back!' and rushed forwards to pull him. But he was hit right in the face by a backward elbow attack from Chu Wanli. At once, his nose turned black and his mouth swelled up.

Meeting such an opponent was not what Duan Yanqing wished for. By now, he and Chu Wanli had exchanged thirty stances or so, and he had pierced more than ten deep holes in Chu Wanli's body. Chu Wanli, however, was still shouting and fighting violently. Duan Yanqing and the bystanders all were astounded and felt that this matter was very far from what was usual. Zhu Danchen knew that if Chu Wanli kept fighting, he would certainly die. Tears rolled down his face. He wanted to rush forwards to help him, but when he had just taken a step, suddenly he heard a 'hu' sound. Chu Wanli had thrown the copper staff at the enemy with all his might. And it went with great force. Duan Yanqing thrust out with his iron cane and hit the copper staff right in the middle, then, with a light upward movement of the iron cane, the copper staff flew to his back. When the copper staff had not yet fallen on the ground, Chu Wanli spread his ten fingers and rushed at Duan Yanqing.

Duan Yanqing, sneering slightly, made a thrust of the cane at chest high. The four people Duan Zhengchun, Fan Hua, Hua Hegen and Zhu Danchen exclaimed in unison and went forwards to help him at the same time. But this thrust

of the cane by Duan Yanqing was too swift. With a 'pu' sound, the cane stuck in Chu Wanli's chest squarely then pierced from the chest through to the back. After his right cane had pierced through Chu Wanli, he pressed his left cane on the ground and floated away several zhang (3.333 m).

Blood spurted out wildly from the wounds on Chu Wanli's chest and back but he still wanted to chase after Duan Yanqing. However, after taking one step, he had no strength to lift his foot, so he turned around and talked to Duan Zhengchun: 'My Lord, Chu Wanli prefers death to dishonor. All my life I've never let the House of Duan of Dali down.'

Duan Zhengchun fell on his right knee and said tearfully: 'Brother Chu, it's because I fathered my daughter but didn't teach her that she offended you. Zhengchun is extremely ashamed of that.'

Chu Wanli turned to Zhu Danchen and smiled, saying: 'Good Brother, this elder brother must go first. You... you...' When he had just said two 'you' words, his breathing stopped, and he died. But his body still stood upright without falling.

Hearing he say the words 'prefers death to dishonor' in his dying moment, everyone knew that he disregarded his life and recklessly attacked Duan Yanqing like that because the intention of dying had germinated in him long ago as a result of the humiliation of being caught in A'Zi's fishing net. People in wulin all knew the principle of 'There are still people stronger than strong people and there are still mountains higher than high mountains.' It was not a burning shame when a person was bested in martial arts, because if they practiced intensely for ten years, it was not like there would not be a day when they would have their revenge. However, because Chu Wanli was a servant of the Duan Clan and A'Zi was Duan Zhengchun's daughter, there was no way for Chu Wanli to get rid of this humiliation in his life, thus he was willing to lose his life in battle. Zhu Danchen wept



loudly. Even though Fu Sigui and Gu Ducheng had not yet recovered from their serious injuries, they both rose and wanted to fight Duan Yanqing to the death.

Suddenly, there was the clear voice of a girl: 'This man's martial arts were too bad. Bringing about his own death like that for nothing, wasn't he a big fool?' It was none other than A'Zi who said that.

The people such as Duan Zhengchun were being sorrowful, so hearing these cold and unkind mocking words of her they could not help getting furious. The people such as Fan Hua glowered at her, but because she was their Lord's daughter, it was inconvenient for them to express their emotions. Duan Zhengchun's anger surged up. He turned his hand and swung it at her face in a heavy slap.

Ruan Xingzhu raised her hand to block it, saying sulkily: "You abandoned your own daughter to other people for ten-odd years, not knowing if she was dead or alive. Today you've met her again, yet you still have the heart to beat her?"

Duan Zhengchun had always felt ashamed that he had not treated Ruan Xingzhu well. Moreover, he had always been obedient to her, and was unwilling to dispute with her in front of other people. Hence when this palm attack was about to hit her arm, he hurriedly drew it back. He said angrily to A'Zi: 'Uncle Chu was harmed to death by you, do you know that?'

A'Zi slightly twitched her small mouth and said: 'They call you 'Lord' so I'm his little master. Killing one vassal or two--What's so serious about it?' Her expression was very disdainful.

At that time, the dividing line between rulers and subjects were very strict, so as much that 'when a ruler wanted a subject to die, the subject was not allowed not to die.' The people such as Chu Wanli were officials in the imperial court of the State of Dali, so they certainly deeply revered the Duan Clan. However, the House of Duan had its

origin in the wulin of Central Plains and had always complied with jianghu customs, therefore even though the people such as Hua Hegen and Chu Wanli were subjects, Duan Zhengming and Duan Zhengchun had always treated them like brothers. In his youth, Duan Zhengchun had frequently travelled jianghu in Central Plains. Chu Wanli had followed him to go through life-or-death situations and experience not a few dangers. How could he be the same as an ordinary vassal? Hearing those words of A'Zi, the people such as Fan Hua was even unhappier. So long as it was not at a court or a temple, even Emperor Baoding always added the word 'brother' when he addressed them, much less Duan Zhengchun, who had not yet been enthroned, and A'Zi, who was merely an illegitimate daughter with no proper status of his?

Not only was Duan Zhengchun distressed at the death of Chu Wanli, he also felt ashamed to have such a daughter. Putting up his sword, he floated out and pointed at Duan Yanqing, saying: 'If you want to kill me--then just come to take my life. The Duan Clan uses 'benevolence and righteousness' to manage state affairs. If you kill innocent people excessively, even if you get the country, it won't last long.'

From the bottom of his heart, Xiao Feng secretly sneered: 'The words from your mouth are so pleasant to hear. At this moment you're still acting as the gentleman.'

With a press of his iron cane, Duan Yanqing was already in front of Duan Zhengchun. He asked: 'You wanna fight me one-on-one with no outsider involved, right?' Duan Zhengchun replied: 'Yes! You only want to kill me then go to Dali and kill my Emperor elder brother. Whether you can achieve your goals--depends on your fortune. My subordinates and family members have nothing to do with the matter between you and me.' He knew Duan Yanqing's martial arts were really too formidable so today he himself would probably lose his life here. But he hoped that Duan

Yanqing would not make things difficult for Ruan Xingzhu, A'Zi and the people such as Fan Hua. Duan Yanqing said: 'Kill your family, but spare your subordinates. It was because my Emperor father was benevolent and didn't kill your brother and you in the past that there is this disaster of usurpation and rebellion of today.'

Duan Zhengchun thought: 'I, Duan Zhengchun, will die with honor and won't leave behind anything for other people to sneer at.' He folded his hands in salute to Chu Wanli's corpse, saying: 'Brother Chu, today Duan Zhengchun is going to fight the enemy with you side by side.' Then he turned to Fan Hua and said: 'Minister of War Fan, after I have died, my tomb and Brother Chu's will be side by side, and with no master-vassal separation.'

Duan Yanqing said: 'Ha-ha, hypocrite, you're still trying to win the hearts of other people. You think they'd help you with all their strength?'

Duan Zhengchun did not say anything. With his left hand forming a sword, he thrust out with the long sword in his right hand. This 'That Sharpness Cuts Metal' stance was the starting stance of the 'Duan Family Sword.' Duan Yanqing certainly knew its variations profoundly. He reacted calmly at once with a stance of his cane. As soon as the two fought, they both used the martial arts of the Duan family that had been handed down from generation to generation. Duan Yanqing used his canes like swords. His purpose was to kill Duan Zhengchun with the 'Duan Family Sword' swordsmanship. He and Duan Zhengchun became the enemies of each other not because of any personal enmity, but because they both contended for the throne of Dali. Now, all the three Dukes of Dali were here, if he used heterodox martial arts to kill Duan Zhengchun, the court officials of Dali would certainly disapprove of him. But if he used the orthodox 'Duan Family Sword' of his family to defeat the enemy and win the battle, his actions would be perfectly justifiable, and no one would be able to have a

word of dissent. The fight for the throne between the brothers of the Duan Clan had nothing to do with the officials, so in the future if he ascended the throne and became the Emperor, it would be very convenient for him.

Seeing Duan Yanqing using their family's skills with the canes, Duan Zhengchun was somewhat calm. Holding his breath and concentrating his mind, he did his best to execute his sword stances properly. His footwork stable, his sword movements were light and quick, and there was no stance that was not up to standard in offence and defence. Duan Yanqing used the 'Duan Family Sword' with the canes. His swordsmanship had big and liberal movements, and looked dignified. Even though its stances were extremely light, swift and elegant, those qualities came at no cost to its kingly air.

Xiao Feng thought: 'This good chance today is hard to come by. I've always worried about the Purely Yang Finger and the 'Six Meridians Divine Sword' of the Duan Clan. Luckily this thief Duan Zhengchun has been found by a tough enemy, and his enemy is exactly a member of his clan. In the blink of an eye I'll be able to see clearly how powerful these two elite skills of the Duan family are.'

After watching more than twenty stances, he saw that the iron canes in Duan Yanqing's hands seemed to have become heavier gradually. His movements were more sluggish and less smooth than before. But when Duan Zhengchun's long sword clashed with a cane, it rebounded off farther and farther. Xiao Feng secretly approved, thinking: 'Real skills have been put into play. Using these thin light iron canes just like a sixty or seventy jin (0.6 kg) Buddhist staff made of refined iron--this achievement is very outstanding.' The people with good martial arts were often capable of 'lifting heavy objects as if they were light' and using heavy weapons like nothing, but 'lifting light objects as if they were heavy' was a skill of the next level. Even though it seemed 'as if they were heavy', they were not 'really heavy.'

They had to have the fierceness of heavy weapons and the intrinsic deftness of light weapons. Seeing Duan Yanqing using the thin iron canes like steel staves, moreover they were getting heavier and heavier with apparently no end, inwardly Xiao Feng praised him for possessing an exceptional internal energy.

Duan Zhengchun did his best to receive the enemy's stances but he gradually felt that the canes were becoming heavier, which pressed him so much that he was unable to channel his inner breath as he pleased. The martial arts of the House of Duan paid particular attention to internal energy. Therefore, having an unsmooth inner breathing was an indication of inferiority and defeat. But Duan Zhengchun did not panic in the least. Actually, he did not hope that he would be able to win this match of mortal combat by luck. He thought that he had enjoyed a very happy life, so if he lost his life beside the Little Mirror Lake today, there would not be any wrong. Moreover, with Ruan Xingzhu watching him with her affectionate eyes by his side, if he died he would be a romantically successful ghost.

All his life, he had had romantic relationships everywhere. In fact, the affection he had for Ruan Xingzhu was not greater than the affection he had for his wife Dao Baifeng or for any other woman of his. But whenever he was together with a lover, he always treated her wholeheartedly, and even if he had to lose his life for her, he would not hesitate. As for having a new happiness after parting from her, that was a different matter.

The internal energy in the iron canes of Duan Yanqing's became heavier constantly. After exchanging sixty stances or so, the Duan Family Sword technique had been used completely. Seeing that there were several beads of sweat on Duan Zhengchun's nose, but the sound of his breathing was still gentle, long and steady, Xiao Feng thought: 'I've heard that this fellow is amorous and has quite a few lovers. Who'd have thought that he'd have such a lasting internal

energy? I mustn't regard him lightly.' By now, the internal energy in Duan Yanqing's canes had been brought into play to the max. When the iron canes were sent out in attacks, chi-chi sounds could be heard. When Duan Zhengchun warded off a sword stance, his body would shake. And when he warded off another sword stance, his body would shake again.

All the stances that the two of them used were the ones that they had learned and achieved mastery of since the age of thirteen or fourteen. Even the people such as Fan Hua and Ba Tianshi had also seen and been used to these stances for the past several decades. Hence this sword fight was not a battle of stances, but a battle of internal energy. Watching to this point, the people such as Fan Hua knew that Duan Zhengchun could not endure this. They gave each other hints with the eyes and grasped their weapons, wanting to go into action together to help him.

Suddenly a girl giggled and said: 'So laughable, so laughable! Every one of the people known as heroes and exceptional men of Dali now wants to charge forwards together and rely on number to win. Wouldn't it turn them into shameless pigmies?'

Everyone was startled. Seeing that those few sentences were obviously the work of A'Zi, they all were extremely puzzled. The person who was facing danger was her father, and she was not ignorant of it, but why could she say those mocking words?

Ruan Xingzhu said angrily: 'A'Zi, what do you know? Your father is the South-Stabilizing Prince of the State of Dali. The fellow who's fighting him is the traitor of the Duan family. These friends all were subjects of the State of Dali. Eliminating the cruel ones and suppressing the rebels are everyone's duties.' Her swimming skills were masterful, but her martial arts were mediocre. Seeing that her beau had been in danger repeatedly, she was anxious, calling: 'Let's

charge side by side, everyone. The enemy is an evil traitor. Why still care about jianghu customs?’

A'Zi laughed and said: ‘Mom, your words are very funny. They’re just an unreasonable sophism. It’s because my Dad is such a hero and brave man that I accepted him. If he was a shameless fellow who wants to rely on other people’s help in fighting, why would I accept a fellow of this sort as father?’

These few sentences went into everyone’s ears clearly. Fan Hua and the people such as Ba Tianshi and Hua Hegen looked at each other in blank dismay. They all felt that it was undoubtedly improper to go forwards to help, but it would be no good if they did not go into action.

Even though Duan Zhengchun was a man who is fond of pursuing romance, he cherish the reputation of being ‘a hero and brave man’ very much. He often made fun of himself, saying: ‘It’s hard for a hero to pass the beauty pass,’ even if I can’t pass the beauty pass, I’m still a hero. How can’t I see that the Conqueror of Chu (Xiang Yu) had Yu Ji, the Supreme Ancestor of Han (Liu Bang) had Lady Qi, and Li Shimin had Wu Zetian?’ So he simply disdained to do mean and cowardly things. Even though he was being in an intense fight, hearing A'Zi’s words, he said loudly at once: ‘What’s so important about life and death, victory and defeat? Whoever goes forward to help will make things difficult for Duan Zhengchun.’

Opening his mouth to say, it was unavoidable that his internal energy became impure. But Duan Yanqing did not seize the opportunity to press forward. Instead, he retreated one step, propped his canes on the ground and waited for Duan Zhengchun to finish saying before resuming fighting. The people such as Fan Hua were secretly frightened when they saw Duan Yanqing had such leisurely and refined behavior and that he did not try to gain any unfair advantage. Obviously he was secure in the knowledge that

he had strong backing, so he did not need to take advantage of this situation.

Duan Zhengchun smiled, saying: 'Let's continue!' He made a swing of the left sleeve and, making use of the wind created by the sleeve, sent out the long sword.

Ruan Xingzhu said: 'A'Zi, you see, your father's swordsmanship is so swift and fierce. If he really wants to finish this zombie off, he'll be more than good enough. But he's got the status of a prince, so in fact he can still leave it to his subordinates. He doesn't need to do it himself.' A'Zi said: 'If Dad could finish him off, then nothing would be better. I'm only afraid that you're talking tough, but feeble inside, Mom. Your words sound completely impressive, but in your heart, you're extremely scared.' These few sentences described exactly her mother's state of mind. Ruan Xingzhu glowered at her daughter, thinking: 'This brat really doesn't know what's good or bad, and talks inconsiderately.'

They saw Duan Zhengchun execute three swift stances continuously with his long sword. The internal energy in Duan Yanqing's iron canes became stronger, forcing the enemy's sword back one stance after another. In the fourth stance, 'Golden Horse Rises into the Air', Duan Zhengchun swung his sword out horizontally. Duan Yanqing replied with the 'Green Jade Rooster Heralds Dawn' stance by thrusting out with the iron cane in his left hand. When the cane and the sword came into contact with each other, they immediately stuck together. Making 'gu-gu' sounds in his throat, Duan Yanqing suddenly pushed his right cane against the ground and his body rose into the air. The head of the cane in his left hand was still sticking together with the tip of Duan Zhengchun's sword.

In an instant, one man stood on the ground with both his feet, absolutely still like a deep abyss or a lofty mountain, and the other was in mid-air with his whole body, floating freely like a willow branch in the wind.



‘Oh,’ all the bystanders exclaimed. They knew that the two of them had reached the important moment--fighting with internal energy. Standing on the ground, Duan Zhengchun was able to borrow force through his feet, which was to his advantage. However, Duan Yanqing was pressing down from a higher position, so the weight of his whole body was put on the enemy’s long sword, also adding to his internal energy.

After a short while, everyone saw that the long sword gradually bent and slowly turned into an arc. The thin iron cane, however, was still as straight as an arrow.

Xiao Feng saw that the long sword in Duan Zhengchun’s hand became more and more curved, and if it was bent a little more, perhaps it would be broken into two. He thought: ‘All along, the two haven’t used their most profound technique ‘Six Meridians Divine Sword.’ Could it be that Duan Zhengchun knows he isn’t as good at this technique as his enemy, so he thinks it’d be better to hide his clumsiness? But judging from his expression when using internal energy, it seems he has used up all his reserve of power. It doesn’t look like he still has some unused special skill at all.’

Duan Zhengchun, seeing that the long sword in his hand could snap at any moment, took a deep breath and quickly pushed out with his right finger. It was none other than the Purely Yang Finger technique. His accomplishment in finger force was still rather inferior to that of his elder brother Duan Zhengming, and the finger force was unable to go farther than three Chi (33.33 cm). The cane and the sword were sticking together, and the total length of two weapons was as great as eight Chi, so this finger attack was certainly unable to injure the enemy. Hence the finger force was totally not aimed at Duan Yanqing, but was aimed at his iron cane.

Xiao Feng slightly frowned, thinking: ‘It seems this fellow can’t use the Six Meridians Divine Sword. He’s still not as

good as my sworn brother. This finger attack is merely a very good acupuncture point blocking skill, nothing more. What's so fantastic about it?' But he saw that whenever Duan Zhengchun's finger hit Duan Yanqing's iron cane, it slightly shook and Duan Zhengchun's long sword became somewhat straighter. He continuously poked three times so the long sword in his hand became less bent three times, gradually reverting to its original state.

A'Zi, however, said again: 'Mom, you see, Dad is using both his finger and the sword, but he can only match a thin cane of that fellow's. If the enemy attacks with the other cane, could it be that Dad has three hands to handle it? If he doesn't, then crawling on the ground and raising his feet will also be good. Even though he'll look ugly, it'll still be better than getting stabbed to death by that fellow.'

Ruan Xingzhu was already laden with sorrow watching the fight, yet her daughter, at her side, had always said words that were unpleasant to hear. Before she had replied, she saw Duan Yanqing raised the iron cane in his right hand, and sure enough, with a 'chi' sound, he thrust at Duan Zhengchun's left forefinger with it.

The technique and internal energy of this cane attack of Duan Yanqing were the same as those of the Purely Yang Finger. But using the cane like a finger, he could reach farther thanks to its length. Still, Duan Zhengchun did not dodge it. His finger force and Duan Yanqing's cane force clashed. He felt a burst of ache and tingle in his arm at once. He retracted his finger. When he was about to channel his internal energy again to send out the second finger stance, astoundingly, the black cane before him moved very quickly. The second cane stance of Duan Yanqing was already coming. Duan Zhengchun was shocked: 'He channels his inner breath so quickly. It seems it goes as he pleases. This achievement in the Purely Yang Finger is much profounder than mine.' He returned it at once with a finger stance. But

he was still late by the blink of an eye, so his body slightly shook.

Seeing that he himself had fought Duan Zhengchun for a long time, Duan Yanqing was very afraid that a long delay might cause trouble. If Duan Zhengchun's subordinates charged at him at the same time, it would eventually require plenty of action. So, he brandished his cane like the wind at once and sent out nine stances in an instant. Duan Zhengchun did all he could to fend them off, but when the ninth cane stance came, his internal energy was no longer constant. And so, with a soft 'pu' sound, the tip of the iron cane pierced his shoulder. His body slightly shook, and with a 'pai' sound, the long sword in his right hand snapped.

Duan Yanqing suddenly uttered a strange sound from his throat and thrust the iron cane in his right hand at the enemy's head. Determined to take Duan Zhengchun's life immediately with this stance of the cane, he put all his power into the hand, so when the cane went out, it made loud noises.

The three people Fan Hua, Hua Hegen and Ba Tianshi leaped out at the same time and attacked Duan Yanqing from both sides. The three Dukes of Dali saw that the situation was extremely dangerous, and it was definitely too late to save Duan Zhengchun, so they all attacked Duan Yanqing's vital parts directly to force him to retract the cane to save himself. Having already expected this move, Duan Yanqing pressed the iron cane in his left hand on the ground to support his body then channelled enough internal energy into the iron cane in his right hand and swung it out horizontally. In just a shock, he repelled all the three weapons. Then he aimed directly at Duan Zhengchun's head again.

'Ah,' Ruan Xingzhu uttered a sharp cry and quickly rushed over. Seeing that her beau was about to die a gruesome death, she also had no intention of living.

When Duan Yanqing's iron cane was just three cun (3.333 cm) away from Duan Zhengchun's 'Baihui acupuncture point', suddenly Duan Zhengchun's body flew away to one side, and so the cane hit empty air. By now, the three people Fan Hua, Hua Hegen and Ba Tianshi had been forced to retreat simultaneously by Duan Yanqing's iron cane. Ba Tianshi was fast in his reaction. He turned his hand over and grabbed Ruan Xingzhu's wrist so that she would not die in vain at the hands of Duan Yanqing. All of them looked towards Duan Zhengchun at the same time.

This cane stance of Duan Yanqing missed the enemy, but he saw a big fellow stretch out his hand, grab the back side of Duan Zhengchun's neck then forcefully pull him away in the blink of an eye at the very moment when his life was hanging by a thread. This extraordinary hand technique was really beyond imagination. Duan Yanqing had powerful martial arts, but he thought to himself that he was unable to do so. Because his facial muscles were stiff, even though he was amazed, his face did not change colors. He only let out a 'humph' sound from his nostrils.

The person who went into action and saved Duan Zhengchun was, of course, Xiao Feng. While the two Duans were battling each other, he stood to one side and fixed his eyes on the fight. As he saw that Duan Zhengchun was about to be killed by the opponent, he suddenly thought that if Duan Yanqing thrust that cane down, his own intense and deep-seated grievances would become impossible to redress. For the past several days, he had made many vows and taken many oaths, that, in any case, it was impossible for him not to get his revenge. Seeing the enemy before him, how could he let him die at the hands of a stranger? Hence he leaped forward and pulled Duan Zhengchun away.

Duan Yanqing's mind was astute. Not waiting for Xiao Feng to put Duan Zhengchun down, he swung the iron cane in his right hand out like fierce winds and rainstorms, one stance after another. All of the thrusts were aimed at Duan

Zhengchun's vital parts. He was determined to remove this obstacle that was standing before his imperial throne first. How to deal with Xiao Feng would be a matter of the next step.

Flashing left, ducking right, Xiao Feng dodged through the spaces between the stances of the cane while still lifting Duan Zhengchun. Duan Yanqing executed twenty seven stances continuously with his cane, but all along he had not touched a corner of Duan Zhengchun's robe. He was very astonished in his heart and knew that he himself was no match for Xiao Feng. Letting out a strange howl, he suddenly floated out several zhang and asked: 'Who are you, sir? Why do you interfere with this?'

When Xiao Feng had not yet replied, Yun Zhonghe called: 'Big Bro, he's the former Chief of the Beggar Society Qiao Feng. Your good disciple Soul Chasing Staff Tan Qing died at the hands of this villain.'

After these words were said, not only was Duan Yanqing shocked, but even the extraordinary people of Dali were also shocked, and their expressions changed. The name Qiao Feng resounded in the world. There was no one in wulin who had never heard of 'North Qiao Feng, South Murong.' But when he introduced himself to Fu Sigui and Duan Zhengchun, he only claimed to be 'Xiao Feng, a Khitan.' So, everyone did not know that he was the famous Qiao Feng. Now, after hearing these words of Yun Zhonghe, they all thought to themselves: 'So it is him. Chivalrous and brave, he really deserves his reputation.'

Duan Yanqing had already heard Yun Zhonghe relate in details how not only had his satisfying disciple Tan Qing failed to harm other people at Juxian Manor but he had also been killed by Qiao Feng. At this moment, hearing that the big fellow before him was the killer of his disciple, he was both angry and anxious. He held out an iron cane and wrote on a bluestone flagstone: 'Sir, what's the enmity between

us? Having killed my disciple, now you've spoiled my important business again.'

'Chi-chi' sounds were heard continuously, as if he was writing on sand. Every stroke of the seventeen words went deep into the stone. When combined with high-level internal energy, his ventriloquism technique could capture the hearts of other people and mix up their minds. It was an extremely formidable heterodox technique. But this technique simply used mental force to control the enemy, if the enemy's internal energy cultivation was better than his, he would be harmed by them. He already knew how Tan Qing had died, and now he saw the skills that Xiao Feng used to save Duan Zhengchun, so he dared not rashly use his ventriloquism technique to talk to Xiao Feng.

Seeing that Duan Yanqing had finished writing, Xiao Feng, without saying anything, walked forward, pressed his foot against the ground and made several sweeps, immediately erasing completely all the seventeen words on the flagstone. It was already very hard for one man to use an iron cane to write on a flagstone, but the other man used his foot to remove the words. This skill with the sole of the foot was much more difficult than concentrating internal energy in the tip of the cane. With one person writing and the other erasing, a bluestone flagstone on the lakeside path astoundingly seemed just like a beach.

Seeing Xiao Feng erase those words, Duan Yanqing knew that, first, he wanted to display his skills, and second, he wanted to say that there was no enmity between them, and that if he himself could ignore the antipathy that he had unintentionally caused in the past, then both of them should stop. Knowing that he himself was no match for Xiao Feng, Duan Yanqing thought it would be better to get away as soon as possible, to avoid tasting the present deficiencies. Using the iron cane in his right hand, he drew a stroke from the top down at once, followed by an upward stroke, expressing the intention of 'writing off at one stroke.' Then

he immediately gave the ground a poke with an iron cane, leaped backward, turned around and went away as if floating.

South Sea Divine Alligator looked Xiao Feng up and down with his strange eyes wide open. His heart full of disrespect, he cursed: 'Fvck, what's so amazing about this dog bastard...' Before he had finished saying, his body suddenly rose into the air and flew towards the center of the lake. A plop was heard when water was splashed on all sides as a result of him falling into the lake.

Xiao Feng exceedingly hated being called 'bastard' by other people. While still carrying Duan Zhengchun with his left hand, he rushed over and threw South Sea Divine Alligator into the lake with his right hand. This action of his was extremely fast and did not allow South Sea Divine Alligator the smallest room for resisting.

South Sea Divine Alligator had lived at the South China Sea for a long time, and called himself 'Divine Alligator', so his swimming skills were certainly excellent. Pushing his feet against the bottom of the lake, he jumped up to the surface and cried: 'How did you pull that?' As he finished this sentence, his body sunk to the bottom again. He pushed his feet against the bottom of the lake once more, jumped up to the surface and cried: 'You sneakily attacked your father!' Finishing this sentence, he sunk again. In the third time of jumping up, he cried: 'Your father won't let you get away!' His temper was extremely irascible so he could not wait until he had come ashore to start cursing Xiao Feng. He kept jumping up, letting out a sentence of abuse and sinking.

A'Zi laughed and said: 'Everyone sees, this fellow emerges from the water and submerges. Doesn't he look like a big black turtle (Play on words: black turtle = cuckold)?' It happened that South Sea Divine Alligator jumped up to the surface right in this moment. Hearing she said so, he cursed: 'It's just you who are a black turtle...' A'Zi raised her hand. A 'chi' sound was heard as she fired a flying awl at him. When

the flying awl came, South Sea Divine Alligator had already sunk to the bottom of the lake.

South Sea Divine Alligator swam to the shore and climbed up, dripping wet. Remarkably, he was not afraid in the slightest. He walked up to Xiao Feng brazenly, tilted his head and glowered at him, saying: 'What's the technique you threw me into the lake with? Your father doesn't know this technique.' Ye Erniang, standing at a place seven or eight zhang away, called: 'Third, go quickly. Don't make a fool of yourself here.' South Sea Divine Alligator said angrily: 'I was thrown into the lake by him and don't even know the technique he used. How can this not be a burning shame? Of course I must ask clearly.'

A'Zi said very solemnly: 'Alright, I'm telling you. This technique of his is called the 'Turtle Throwing Skill'.'

South Sea Divine Alligator said: 'Oh, so it's called the 'Turtle Throwing Skill'. As I already know the name of this skill, I'll beg other people to teach it to me and train hard so that later I won't be at this disadvantage.' As he finished saying, he left with quick steps. By now, Ye Erniang and Yun Zhonghe had already gone far.



## Chapter 23: The Promise Made About the Cattle and Sheep of the Northern Land Came to Naught

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Xiao Feng put Duan Zhengchun lightly on the ground and retreated several steps.

Ruan Xingzhu took a deep bow to express her gratitude and said: 'Chief Qiao, first you saved my daughter. Now you've saved him... him... I really don't know how to thank you.' The people such as Fan Hua and Zhu Danchen also came over to thank him.

Xiao Feng said sternly: 'Xiao Feng saved him totally out of self-interest. All of you need not mention it. Prince Duan, I ask you one question. Please answer honestly. That year you made a big mistake that in your heart you've been ashamed of, right? Though this mistake might not have stemmed from your true intentions, you harmed a child to the point of being wretched for life and not knowing its own parents. Is that right?' Every time thinking about the fact that both his parents had died tragically outside Yanmen Pass, he was in agony, so he was unwilling to state it clearly in front of everybody.

Duan Zhengchun's face reddened greatly all over then immediately turned pale. He lowered his head, saying: 'Yes, all my life I've been troubled by this matter. Every time thinking about it, I feel very uneasy. But the blunder was already made. It's hard to make up for it. Heaven has shown pity on me and today allows me to meet a parentless child of that year again. But... but... alas, I've wronged other people all the time.'

Xiao Feng said in a severe voice: 'You already know that you made a big mistake and made other people suffer, but

why have you still continuously committed one wrongdoing after another since then?’

Duan Zhengchun shook his head and said in a low voice: ‘My conduct has been improper, my virtue has been deficient, and in my life I’ve really done too many absurd things. I feel deeply ashamed thinking about them.’

After hearing Madame Ma say Duan Zhengchun’s name in Xinyang, Xiao Feng had day and night thought that after finding Duan Zhengchun he would execute him by dismemberment. He had been determined that he would only take Duan Zhengchun’s life after making him taste sufficient bits and pieces of suffering. But just now, seeing that Duan Zhengchun was benevolent and righteous to his friends, bold and generous to his enemies, and did not look like a despicable evildoer, he could not help but become suspicious, thinking: ‘His killing of my parents outside Yanmen Pass was due to misunderstanding. Everyone can make this kind of mistake. But he killed my foster parents-- Qiao Sanhuai and his wife--, and harmed my benevolent master Xuan Ku. Those are absolutely unforgivable crimes. Could there still be other details in this?’ He was never rash in his actions, so he asked Duan Zhengchun directly, wanting him to personally answer before he himself determined. Duan Zhengchun, with a deeply embarrassed expression, had said that he had committed grave mistakes which had made him feel uneasy through his life, and that today he had met a parentless child of that year again. As for the matters such as murdering Qiao Sanhuai and his wife, and murdering Venerable Xuan Ku, he had admitted that ‘his conduct had been improper, and his virtue had been deficient.’ Observing all of this, Xiao Feng knew clearly and firmly at once. His face seemed to be covered by a layer of grim frost, and he made a ‘humph’ sound with his nose.

Suddenly, Ruan Xingzhu said: ‘He... he’s always been like this. I don’t... don’t blame him.’ Xiao Feng turned to her and saw that she was having a smiling expression and looking at

Duan Zhengchun with her pair of starry eyes which was exuding tenderness and love. His anger surging up, he let out a 'humph' sound and said: 'Well, so he's always been like this.' Then he turned his head back and said to Duan Zhengchun: 'Tonight, at the third watch (midnight to two a.m.), I'll be waiting on that bluestone bridge. I have something to discuss a little with you, sir.'

Duan Zhengchun said: 'I'll definitely arrive on time. I dare not repay this great debt of gratitude with words, but you've come here from afar, why not go into that small house over there to have a drink for a few cups?' Xiao Feng said: 'How is your injury, sir? Do you need to rest for a few days?' Strangely, he seemed to turn a deaf ear to the invitation to drink wine. Slightly baffled, Duan Zhengchun said: 'Brother Qiao, many thanks for your solicitude. This minor injury is not significant.'

Xiao Feng nodded, saying: 'Then that's good. A'Zhu, let's go.' When he had walked two steps, he turned his head around and said to Duan Zhengchun: 'There's no need to take those good subordinate friends of yours along.' Seeing that the people such as Fan Hua and Hua Hegen all were completely loyal brave fellows, he felt that it would certainly be a pity if they went to the bluestone bridge with Duan Zhengchun and thus unavoidably died at his own hands one by one.

Duan Zhengchun thought that this man's words and actions were rather strange. Even the Emperor, also his brother, only smiled about all of these many romantic demerits of his. This man, however, had denounced him in stern words in front of everybody. This was a bit too unduly, but Xiao Feng was the person who had saved his life, so he said: 'Just as you instruct, Honorable Brother.'

Pulling A'Zhu's hand, Xiao Feng left immediately without turning his head around.

Xiao Feng and A'Zhu went to a farmhouse and bought some rice to cook and two chickens to boil to eat their fill.

Because there was no wine, the meal was unavoidably somewhat unexciting. Seeing that A'Zhu seemed to be full of worries and all along she had not said anything, he asked: 'I've found my archenemy. You should feel happy for me.'

A'Zhu smiled, saying: 'Yes, I should be happy.' Seeing that her smile was very unnatural, Xiao Feng said: 'Tonight, after killing this fellow, we'll immediately go north to the outside of Yanmen Pass to gallop on horseback, go hunting, and pasture cattle and sheep, then we'll never go any step inside the Pass. Oh, A'Zhu, before seeing Duan Zhengchun, I took an oath that I'd kill his whole family without sparing even fowls and dogs. But unexpectedly this fellow has personal loyalty, so I think only the one who did the deed should be responsible for it. There's no need to find the other members of his family.' A'Zhu said: 'Having this humane thought, you'd amass a lot of credit in the Underworld and future blessing.' Xiao Feng burst out laughing and said: 'My pair of hands has killed many people. What credit in the Underworld or future blessing would there still be for me?'

Seeing A'Zhu's elegant eyebrows wrinkling, he asked again: 'A'Zhu, why aren't you happy? You don't want me to kill again, right?' A'Zhu replied: 'It's not that I'm unhappy, but somehow my stomach is aching very much.' Xiao Feng stretched out his hand to check her pulse and felt that it was beating unsteadily and hastily. He said softly: 'The journey has been hard on you. I'm afraid you've caught a cold. I'm gonna ask the granny to cook a bowl of ginger soup for you to drink.'

When the ginger soup had not yet been done, A'Zhu shivered all over repeatedly and said in a quavering voice: 'I'm cold, I'm cold.' Xiao Feng, sympathizing with her very much, removed his robe and wrapped it around her body. A'Zhu said: 'Big Brother, after getting your revenge tonight, you will have fulfilled your great goal. Naturally I should go with you. Hopefully I would get somewhat better.' Xiao Feng

said: 'No! No! You stay here to rest and have a sleep. When you wake up I'll have already brought Duan Zhengchun's head back.'

A'Zhu sighed and said: 'I'm feeling very ill, Big Brother, it can't be helped. I'm unable to go with you. I really want to accompany you and be together with you. I really don't want to be separated from you... You... You're such a lonely man. I'm not treating you well.'

Hearing her say in a deeply tender manner, Xiao Feng was touched. He held her hand and said: 'We'll only be separated from each other for a while. What's the big deal? A'Zhu, you treat me really well. I don't know how I should repay your kindness.'

A'Zhu said: 'We won't be separated for just a while. I feel that it will be very long, very long. Big Brother, after you leave me, I'll be all alone. And you'll be all by yourself, too. You had better take me beyond Yanmen Pass immediately. We'll go pasture cattle and sheep like this. And you'll take revenge on Duan Zhengchun one year later. Is that all right? Let me be with you for one year first.'

Xiao Feng gently stroked her beautiful hair, saying: 'We've found him with great difficulty. After settling this score tonight, we'll never return to Central Plains. Duan Zhengchun's martial arts are far inferior to mine. He can't use the 'Six Meridians Divine Sword' either. But if we waited for one year, we'd have to go to Dali. The Duan Family of Dali has very many experts, if your big brother encountered a master of the 'Six Meridians Divine Sword', I'd probably lose. It's not that I don't want to listen to you, but there're many problems in this.'

A'Zhu nodded and said in a low voice: 'That's right. I shouldn't ask you to wait for one year then go to Dali to find him and get your revenge. You absolutely mustn't go into the tiger's den alone.'

'Ha-ha,' Xiao Feng laughed and lifted the empty bowl up and took a gulp. He was in the habit of drinking with big

bowls. At the moment there was nothing in the bowl, but doing so was still good enough. He said: 'If I, Xiao Feng, was alone, even if the Duan Family in Dali is a dragon's lair or tiger's den, I'd still rush in without worrying the least about life and death and dangers. But now I already have little A'Zhu. I want to take care of you and be with you for life, so Xiao Feng's life is very precious.'

A'Zhu leaned on his bosom, her back slightly shaking. Xiao Feng gently caressed her hair. There was a feeling of quietude and warmth in his heart. He thought: 'Having such a wife, what is still there to regret?' In an instant, he could not help letting his mind gallop to the frontier and his heart fly beyond the Pass. He thought that one month later, he and A'Zhu would ride on horseback together in the prairies, go hunting and do shepherding without having to take precautions against being harmed by the enemy, and without worry and anxiety. How carefree and relaxed would they be! But he had not yet repaid the man in black for the great kindness of saving his life at Juxian Manor that day, so he was unavoidably uneasy. However, because this kind of great hero of course did benevolent deeds without hoping for requital, Xiao Feng thought that in this lifetime he would have no choice but to owe him this debt of gratitude.

Xiao Feng noticed that it was gradually getting dark. Leaning on his bosom, A'Zhu was already sleeping deeply. He took out three Qian of silver (~ four g), gave it to the farmer, and asked him to prepare a vacant room. Then he carried A'Zhu and set her down on the bed, covered her with a quilt, lowered the bed's curtain, and sit in the hall of the farmhouse with his eyes closed in meditation. Not long after, he felt asleep deeply.

After sleeping for more than four hours, he opened the door and walked out. He saw that the new moon was hanging above the tops of the trees at an oblique angle, and in the northwest corner, dark clouds were gathering. It appeared there would likely be a big thunderstorm tonight.

Xiao Feng put on his robe and went towards the bluestone bridge. After going five li or so (0.5 km) he arrived at the river bank. He could see the reflection of the moon in the river, but half of the sky in the west side was already full of dark clouds. At times, there were several bolts of lightning shot out from the clouds, illuminating the surroundings. But after the lightning was gone, it seemed to be even darker. In a distant graveyard, will-o'-the-wisps were fluttering to and fro on the grass.

Xiao Feng went faster and faster. Before long, he arrived at the bluestone bridge. Taking a look in the direction of the Ursa Major, he noticed that it was not yet past the second watch (10 p.m - twelve p.m), still early. He thought: 'Because I want to settle the big score, I couldn't remain calm and have unexpectedly arrived one watch earlier.' In his life, he had had many appointments in which his life had been at stake, and he had met not just a few opponents who were better at martial arts and more renowned than Duan Zhengchun. However, tonight he felt unusually uneasy in his heart, and he was lacking the indomitable, do-or-die spirit of the past.

Standing at the side of the bridge and looking at the water which was slowly flowing under it, he thought: 'That's right. In the past I came and went alone and didn't have to take care of anyone. But tonight I have A'Zhu in my mind. Oh, this's really known as 'when immersed in love, a hero loses heart.'" As he thought of this, some tender feelings could not help emerging from the bottom of his heart. The trace of a smile was visible on his mouth. He thought: 'If A'Zhu was standing here with me, it'd be much better.'

Knowing Duan Zhengchun's martial arts were nowhere near as good as his own, he thought there was no need to be worried about the outcome of the duel tonight. Seeing that the time of the appointment had not yet come, he sat down beneath a tree beside the bridge to concentrate his mind and do breathing exercise. Gradually, his Lingtai (an

acupuncture point at the middle of the back) became empty and clear, and miscellaneous thoughts no longer existed.

Suddenly, lightning flashed, followed by a boom of thunder. Then a bolt of lightning struck down from the mass of clouds. Xiao Feng opened his eyes and thought: 'There's going to be heavy rain in an instant. Is it already near the third watch?'

Right at this moment, he saw a man walking slowly on the road leading to the Little Mirror Lake. It was none other than Duan Zhengchun.

He walked up to Xiao Feng, took a deep bow with hands clasped and said: 'What, may I ask, does Chief Qiao want to instruct me by summoning me?'

Xiao Feng slightly tilted his head and looked askance at him. Suddenly, he was burning with rage. He said: 'Prince Duan, the purpose of my making an appointment with you here--could it be you don't know what it is?'

Duan Zhengchun sighed and said: 'You do this because of the incident outside Yanmen Pass that year when I listened to the words of an evildoer by mistake, was stirred up by them and harmed your mother to death, causing your father to commit suicide. It was really a big mistake.'

Xiao Feng said sternly: 'Why did you also harm my foster parents--Qiao Sanhuai and his wife--, and murder my benevolent master Venerable Xuan Ku?'

Duan Zhengchun slowly nodded and said sorrowfully: 'I only hoped to conceal this matter. Who would have thought that I would sink more and more deeply and eventually wouldn't be able to extricate myself from this?'

Xiao Feng said: 'Ha, who'd have thought you're a straightforward fellow? Will you punish yourself, or gotta wait for me to go into action?'

Duan Zhengchun said: 'Chief Qiao, if you hadn't shown your skills and saved me, today at noon I would have lost my life beside the Little Mirror Lake. It's all thanks to your favor,



sir, that I could live a half more day. Chief Qiao, if you want to take my life, then you should just do it.'

At this moment, there was a bang of thunder, and raindrops, big as soya beans, suddenly poured down noisily.

Hearing his bold and generous words, Xiao Feng could not refrain from feeling touched. Usually, Xiao Feng liked to make friends with heroes and brave men, so after he had seen Duan Zhengchun, observing that this man had a heroic bearing and was straightforward, he had taken a liking to him. If this was an ordinary mistake, then even if it was a great insult to Xiao Feng himself, he would have already dismissed it with a laugh, and gone drinking tens of bowls of spirit with Duan Zhengchun. But the deaths of his parents did not allow him to live under the same sky with the enemy, how could he let Duan Zhengchun pass at this juncture? He raised one hand and said: 'As a son and a disciple, I'm not allowed not to get revenge for the deaths of my parents and master. You killed my father, mother, foster father, foster mother, and my first benevolent master, five people altogether, so I'll attack you with five blows of my palms. After you've undergone five palm attacks of mine, whether you'll be dead or alive, the enmity in the past will be written off at one stroke.'

Duan Zhengchun forced a smile and said: 'Exchanging one life for only one palm attack, this retribution is a bit too easy on me. I deeply appreciate your great kindness.'

Xiao Feng thought: 'Don't you think that your Dali Duan Clan's martial arts are preeminent. I'm afraid you won't be able to withstand the force of one blow of my palm.' Then he said: 'Watch out for this palm.' His left hand moved in a circle, and his right palm struck out with a 'hu' sound.

Suddenly lightning flashed, followed by a boom of thunder in mid-air. The thunder strengthened the force of the palm, so this palm attack of Xiao Feng was executed with the power of heaven and earth, and wind and thunder. With a 'peng' sound, it hit Duan Zhengchun's chest squarely.

At once, Xiao Feng saw he stood unsteadily and fell down. A 'pai' sound was heard as he bumped against the railing of the bluestone bridge. He drooped weakly, motionless.

Xiao Feng was startled: 'Why didn't he raise his hands to meet my attack? And why is he so bad?' He jumped forwards, grabbed the back of Duan Zhengchun's collar and lifted him up. He was alarmed. His ears heard ceaseless rolls of thunder, and the heavy rain was sprinkling water on his face and his body, but he felt nothing. He only thought: 'How has he become so light?'

Today at noon, when going into action and saving Duan Zhengchun, he had lifted him up for quite a while. A person with excellent martial arts could immediately detect the difference of even one jin or half a jin (0.6 kg) in weight in their hands. But at this moment, Xiao Feng felt that Duan Zhengchun's body had suddenly become lighter by tens of jin. A burst of indescribable fear suddenly emerged in his heart. He broke into a cold sweat all over.

At this moment, a bolt of lightning flashed again. Xiao Feng stretched out his hand and made a grab at Duan Zhengchun's face. In his hand was a pile of squishy matter which fell away after just a wipe of his hand. In the light of flashes he could see clearly, and so he shouted involuntarily: 'A'Zhu, A'Zhu, so it's you!'

He felt that his whole body had not the slightest strength, so he could not help but kneel down, hugging A'Zhu's legs. He knew that the palm attack just now had been executed with all his power, so not even a first-class hero or bold man in wulin would be able to remain unharmed without using their palm attacks to receive it, to say nothing of this fragile little girl A'Zhu. This blow of the palm certainly had broken all her ribs and crushed her five internal organs. Even if Divine Doctor Xue was here and gave her immediate treatment, he would still surely have a hard time snatching her life back.

A'Zhu leaned against the railing of the bridge. Her body slowly slid down and fell on Xiao Feng's body. She said in a low voice: 'Big Brother, I... I... treated you very badly. Are you angry with me?'

Xiao Feng said loudly: 'I'm not angry with you. I'm angry with myself.' As he finished, he raised his hand and brought it down on his own head in a fierce blow.

A'Zhu made a slight move with her left hand, wanting to prevent him from hitting himself. But she was unable to raise her arm, so she said: 'Big Brother, you must promise me that you'll never ever harm yourself.'

Xiao Feng cried: 'Why are you doing this? Why? Why?'

A'Zhu replied in a low voice: 'Big Brother, unfasten my gown, and take a look at my left shoulder.' On their thousand-of-li journey, Xiao Feng and she had travelled together and lodged in the same inns, but from beginning to end, they had always controlled themselves and observed etiquette. At this moment, hearing her tell him to unfasten her gown, he was startled. A'Zhu said: 'I've already belonged to you. My... my... whole body is yours. Just take a look... take a look at my left shoulder, then you'll understand.'

Xiao Feng's eyes were full of tears. Noticing that she was of sound mind when saying those words, he still had a faint hope. Immediately, he propped her up with his left palm placed against her back, then hurriedly channelled his internal energy and constantly transferred it into her body, hoping that he could make up for his blunder. His right hand slowly undid her gown, exposing her left shoulder.

A long bolt of lightning flashed across the sky. Everything before his eyes was lit up. He saw that the skin of her shoulder was whiter than snow, but there was a 'Duan' character, deep red as blood, tattooed on it.

Xiao Feng was both amazed and grieved. Not daring to look at it for long, he pulled her gown and covered her

shoulder. Then he gently embraced her, saying: 'There's a 'Duan' character on your shoulder--what does it mean?'

A'Zhu replied: 'When my father and mother gave me to other people, they tattooed it on my shoulder so that... so that we would recognize each other someday.' Xiao Feng said in a tremulous voice: 'This 'Duan' character, this 'Duan' character...' A'Zhu said: 'Today, when they discovered an identification mark on Miss A'Zi's shoulder, they knew at once she was their daughter. You... You... Did you see the mark?' Xiao Feng replied: 'No. It was improper for me to see it.' A'Zhu said: 'She... She is also tattooed with a red 'Duan' character on the shoulder, which is the same as mine.'

Xiao Feng suddenly understood. He said in a quavering voice: 'You... You're their daughter too?'

A'Zhu said: 'At first I didn't know. Only when I saw the word on A'Zi's shoulder did I know that. She has a gold lock too, which is the same as my gold lock. Both are engraved on with twelve characters. The characters on her lock are:

'Lakeside bamboos are emerald green. They herald quietude and plenty of happiness.'

(湖邊竹葉綠如翠 - Pinyin of the first three words: Hu Bian ZHU - Bamboo)

And the characters on my lock are:

'Celestial stars are sparkling. They'll glitter forever. You'll be well forever also.'

(天鵬星斗閃如星 - Pinyin of the first three words: Tian Liang XING - Star)

I... I have never understood the meaning of the poem. I only thought it used nice words that rhyme. But it turns out it contains the name of my mother. My mother is that woman Ruan... Ruan Xingzhu. This pair of locks was given to my mother by my father. After giving birth to me and my sister, she gave each of us one lock, tying them around our necks.'

Xiao Feng said: 'Now I understand. I'll think of a way to cure your injury at once. Let's slowly talk about this matter later.'

A'Zhu said: 'No! No! I must say to you clearly. If I'm delayed for another while, there won't be enough time. Big Brother, please wait until I've finished.' Xiao Feng could not bear to go against her will. He had no choice but to say: 'Alright, I'm gonna listen to you to the finish. But don't exert yourself excessively.' A'Zhu smiled, saying: 'Big Brother, you're really nice, taking me into consideration in everything. How can you dote on me so much?' Xiao Feng said: 'Later on I'll dote on you a hundred times as much, a thousand times as much.'

A'Zhu smiled and said: 'This is enough, this is enough. I wouldn't like you to treat me too well. If I became unruly, then who would control me? Big Brother, I... I hid at the back of the bamboo house and eavesdropped on the conversation between my father, mother and younger sister A'Zi. It turns out my father is already married. He and my mother aren't legit husband and wife. They gave birth to me first, and one year later they gave birth to my younger sister. After that my father wanted to return to Dali. My mother didn't let him go. The two of them had a big quarrel. My mother even hit him, but my father didn't strike back. After that... after that... there was no way, so they couldn't help but break up. My maternal grandfather was very strict when it comes to family education, if he'd known about this affair, he surely would've killed my mother. My mother dared not take me and my sister home, so she had no choice but to send us into other people's houses. But she hoped we would be able to recognize each other someday, so she tattooed a 'Duan' character on my and my sister's shoulders. The person who adopted me only knows that my mother's surname is Ruan. In fact, in fact, my surname is Duan...'

Feeling even sorrier for her, Xiao Feng said in a low voice: 'You're such a miserable child.'

A'Zhu said: 'When my mother gave me to another family, I was just over one year old. So of course I couldn't recognize my father. I couldn't even recognize my mother's face. Big

Brother, you're also like this. In the apricot forest in the evening of that day, when I heard them talking about your origin, in my heart I felt very sorry for you because both of us are similarly miserable children.'

Lightning flashed nonstop. One crash of thunder was heard after another. Suddenly, a big tree on the river bank was struck by lightning and fell down with 'ka-la-la' sounds. However, because the two of them were paying no attention to external things, even though Heaven and Earth were changing greatly, they were still totally unaware of that.

A'Zhu continued: 'Who'd have thought the person who harmed your parents to death is my father? Alas, Heaven's predestination is really too cruel to us. Besides, besides... it was I myself who tactfully discovered the name of my father from Madame Ma. If I hadn't disguised as Bai Shijing and tricked her, she surely wouldn't have been willing to say my father's name. They say that there is Heaven's will in the dark. I've never believed it. But... but... in your opinion, can I believe it now?'

Xiao Feng raised his head. The dark clouds, which were all over the sky, had been blocking the Moon insomuch that there was not the slightest hint of light. A long bolt of lightning flashed across the sky, brightly illuminating the surroundings. It seemed as if Heaven had just suddenly opened its eyes.

He lowered his head dispiritedly, nonplussed in his heart. He asked: 'Do you know for sure Duan Zhengchun is your father?'

A'Zhu said: 'This can't be wrong. I heard my parents hug my younger sister, cry bitterly and tell her how they had abandoned me and my younger sister. My father even said that, in this life, he'd find and bring me back, no matter what. They couldn't have guessed that the daughter they gave birth to was crouching outside the window. Big Brother, just now I pretended that I was ill, but I disguised myself as you then went and told my father that the appointment at

the bluestone bridge tonight was canceled, and every mistake was written off at one stroke. Then I disguised as my father and went to meet you... to let you... to let you...' As she said to here, her breathing was already faint like the threads of a cobweb.

Xiao Feng transferred more internal energy through his palm to keep A'Zhu from exhaustion. He said tearfully: 'Why didn't you tell me? If I had known he is your father...' But he could not say the words following that, because he himself did not know what he should have done if he had known beforehand that Duan Zhengchun was the father of his beloved either.

A'Zhu said: 'I tossed and turned and considered for a very long time. Big Brother, I wanted to be with you for life so much. But how could that be possible? Could I beg you not to seek revenge for the deaths of your five relatives? Even if I talked rot and begged you, you would still give your consent. So, in the end, that was out of the question.'

Her voice became lower and lower as she said. It was still thundering endlessly, but to Xiao Feng, every word A'Zhu said was more soul-shattering than the sky-shaking thunder. He held his head in his hands tightly, saying: 'You could've told your father to run away and not to keep this appointment! Or if your father is a hero or brave man and is unwilling to break this appointment, you could've disguised as me and made another appointment with your father so that we'd meet at a distant place and in the distant future. Why should you, should you make yourself suffer like this?'

A'Zhu said: 'I want you to know that it may not be due to his true intentions at all that a person killed others. Of course you don't wanna harm me, but you hit me with a blow of the palm. My father harmed your parents to death, and that's also a blunder he made without intent.'

Xiao Feng had always been looking intently at her with his head lowered. During the several times when lightning flashed, he saw that the look in her eyes was infinitely

tender. His heart was stirred. Suddenly, he realized that the deep love she had for himself was really beyond his previous imagination. And he suddenly understood: 'Though Duan Zhengchun is her real father, he didn't bring her up at all. If she had merely wanted to make me understand that unintentional mistakes could be forgiven, she wouldn't have had to lose her life in vain like this.' He said tremulously: 'A'Zhu, A'Zhu, you surely have another reason. It wasn't because you wanted to save your father, and nor was it because you wanted me to know that it was an unintentional blunder. This's for my sake! This's for my sake!' Then he rose, embracing her.

A'Zhu had a smiling expression on her face. Seeing that Xiao Feng had eventually understood her underlying intention, she could not help feeling happy. She knew that she was at the end of her life. Even though she had not hoped that her lover would know the intention concealed at the bottom of her heart, he had eventually realized it...

Xiao Feng said: 'This's totally for my sake, A'Zhu, is that right?' A'Zhu said in a low voice: 'Yes.' Xiao Feng said loudly: 'Why? Why?' A'Zhu said: 'The Duan Family of Dali has the Six Meridians Divine Sword. If you killed their South-Stabilizing Prince, how could they be willing to leave you alone? Big Brother, we can't read the words in that 'Muscle Changing Sutra'...'

Xiao Feng suddenly understood. His eyes could not help brimming with tears. Then tears rolled down his face.

A'Zhu said: 'I have one thing to beg you, Big Brother, are you willing to promise me it?' Xiao Feng replied: 'I'll promise you even onehundred or one thousand things, not to mention one thing.' A'Zhu said: 'I only have one younger sister. The two of us haven't been able to be together since childhood. Keep an eye on her, I beg of you. I'm worried she would go down the wrong road.' Xiao Feng forced a laugh and said: 'Wait till you've gotten well, we'll find her so that you'll have a reunion.' A'Zhu said softly: 'Wait till I've gotten



well... Big Brother, then I and you will go outside Yanmen Pass to ride on horseback, go hunting, and pasture cattle and sheep. Do you think my younger sister will be willing to go there?’

Xiao Feng replied: ‘Of course she’ll go. Her elder sister and her brother-in-law invite her, how will she still not go?’

Suddenly a ‘hu-la’ sound was heard. From the cavity under the bridge, a person moved out, saying: ‘How shameless! What is elder sister? What is brother-in-law? I won’t go.’ This person was small and slender, and was wearing a suit of waterproof clothes. She was none other than A’Zi.

After accidentally hitting A’Zhu with a palm attack, Xiao Feng had totally focused his mind on her. Otherwise, with his skills, he definitely would have noticed that there was a person hiding in the water beneath the bridge. But because, firstly, it had been thundering and raining heavily, and secondly, his mind had been in great turmoil, so he had been unable to detect A’Zi until she showed herself. He could not help being slightly shocked and called: ‘A’Zi, A’Zi, you quickly come and see your elder sister.’

A’Zi slightly pouted her small lips, saying: ‘Originally I hid under the bridge to see you and my father fight and to have a jolly time. Who’d have thought you’d hit my elder sister? You two haven’t finished rattling on and saying loving words. I don’t like to hear. You two can talk about love, but why drag me into this?’ As she finished saying, she moved towards them.

A’Zhu said: ‘Good sister, later on big brother Xiao will look after you, you... you’ll look after him, too...’

A’Zi said with a giggle: ‘This ugly rustic barbarian--I’ll ignore him.’

Suddenly Xiao Feng felt A’Zhu, who was leaning on his bosom, slightly tremble. Her head drooped and her beautiful hair spread over her shoulder. She was motionless. Horror-stricken, he called: ‘A’Zhu, A’Zhu.’ He checked her pulse at

once, but it had already stopped beating. It seemed as if his heart had also already stopped. He held out his hand and checked her breathing, but she no longer breathed. He called loudly: 'A'Zhu! A'Zhu!' However, even if he called one thousand or ten thousand times, A'Zhu would not be able to answer him. He hastily transferred his internal energy into her body, but all the while A'Zhu did not move at all.

A'Zi, seeing that A'Zhu had stopped breathing and died, was also shocked. She stopped grinning cheekily and said angrily: 'You beat my elder sister to death. You... you beat my elder sister to death.'

Xiao Feng said: 'Yes, it's I who beat your elder sister to death. You should take revenge for your elder sister. Quick, quickly kill me!' With his two hands drooped, he lowered A'Zhu's body. Then he held forth his chest, crying: 'Quickly kill me.' He really hoped A'Zi would draw a knife and stick it in his chest, thus finishing all his troubles with death and freeing him from endless sufferings.

A'Zi, seeing his facial muscles twitching and his frightening expression, could not help being extremely scared. She retreated several steps and cried: 'You... Don't kill me.'

Following her, Xiao Feng walked forwards several steps. He reached for his chest and, with a 'chi' sound, ripped the cloth that covered the chest, exposing his skin. He said: 'You have poisonous needles, poisonous thorns, poisonous awls... quickly puncture me to death.'

In the light of a flash, A'Zi saw that deep blue wolf head tattoo on his chest with fangs bared and teeth shown, looking ferocious, so she was even more frightened. She suddenly uttered an exclamation, turned around and ran away very fast.

Xiao Feng stood in a daze on the bridge. He was extremely grieved and infinitely remorseful. He raised his hand and with a 'peng' sound he hit the stone railing, causing stone bits to scatter around. He kept dealing one

blow of the palm after another. Then, a loud 'hu-la-la' sound was heard as a block of the stone railing fell into the river. He wanted to wail but was unable to weep anyway. A bolt of lightning flashed by, shining clearly on A'Zhu's face. Those deep love and deep concerns still remained on the tips of her eyebrows and the corners of her mouth.

Xiao Feng let out a scream: 'A'Zhu!' Then, carrying her body, he rushed into the wilderness.

It kept thundering and raining heavily. He ran up the mountain for a while then ran down the valley for another while, totally not knowing where he was. His mind was in chaos, insomuch that it seemed to have gone blank.

The thunder gradually stopped, but it kept raining heavily unceasingly. In the East, dawn was breaking and the sky slowly lightened. Xiao Feng had been rushing around for four hours, but he was not tired in the least. He only wanted to punish himself as much as possible, and only wanted to die immediately to be with A'Zhu forever. Uttering hoarse cries of distress, he rushed around chaotically. Unconsciously, he suddenly returned to the bluestone bridge.

He mumbled to himself: 'I'll go find Duan Zhengchun, find Duan Zhengchun, and ask him to kill me in revenge for his daughter's death.'

Before long, he arrived at the side of the lake. Xiao Feng yelled: 'Duan Zhengchun, I killed your daughter. Come and kill me. I definitely won't strike back. You quickly come out and kill me.' Carrying A'Zhu horizontally in his arms, he stood before the Square Bamboo Forest. After he had waited awhile, the forest was still silent, and no one came out.

He walked into the forest and stopped before the bamboo house. After kicking the door open, he walked into the house and said loudly: 'Duan Zhengchun, be quick and kill me!' The house was empty and without anyone. He searched one time everywhere, from the rooms in the wing to the backyard, but did not find Duan Zhengchun and his

subordinates. Even the owner of the bamboo house Ruan Xingzhu and A'Zi were not here either. The utensils and furnishings in the house were still the same as before. It seemed everyone had gone away hurriedly, and in their hurry they had not had enough time to take along anything.

He thought: 'That's right. A'Zi brought the news. She only thought I still wanted to revenge myself on her father. Even if Duan Zhengchun was unwilling to run away, that surnamed Ruan woman and his subordinates would certainly force him to run far and fly high. Ha-ha, I've come here not to kill you, but to ask you to kill me, ask you to kill me.'

He yelled several times again: 'Duan Zhengchun, Duan Zhengchun!' His voice went very far, but he could only hear the rustle of high winds brushing bamboos. There was not the least bit of human voice.

There was nobody beside the Little Mirror Lake and in the Square Bamboo Forest, only silence. Xiao Feng felt that it seemed there was only him left under Heaven. Ever since A'Zhu had breathed her last, he had not yet put her down for even a minute. For many times he had channelled his internal energy into her body with the hope that Heaven would show pity on him and let her survive the serious injury, just like when she had taken a palm attack of Abbot Xuan Ci previously. But that time, the force of Abbot Xuan Ci's Great Diamond Palm hit the copper mirror in Xiao Feng's hand, so A'Zhu was only affected by the shock. This time, Xiao Feng's palm attack hit her squarely in the chest, how could he save her life? No matter how much internal energy he had channelled into her body, A'Zhu had always been motionless.

Carrying A'Zhu, he sat down before the house in a daze from the morn to midday then to sundown. By now, it had stopped raining, making visible the azure sky, and the setting sun was illuminating his body and A'Zhu's with its dull light.

When he was beset by exceptional fellows at Juxian Manor, even though he was utterly isolated and the situation there was extremely dangerous, he did not waver in his determination in the least. Now, having made an irredeemable blunder with his own hands, he felt more and more lonesome. He felt that he should not live on in the world. 'A'Zhu has died in her father's place, so I can't find Duan Zhengchun to get revenge. What else do I have to do? The great undertaking of the Beggar Society, the grand ambitions and lofty goals of the past are all not worth caring. I'm a Khitan, what great undertaking and grand ambition can I have?'

He walked to the backyard and saw a gardening hoe placed at a corner of a wall. He thought: 'Will I stay here with A'Zhu forever?' He was still carrying A'Zhu in his left hand and did not want to let go of her for even a short while regardless. Lifting up the hoe with his right hand, he went into the Square Bamboo Forest, dug a hole then dug another hole. The two holes were side by side.

He thought: 'When her parents return, they'll probably dig up the grave to see what actually happened. I must put up a tablet in front of the grave.' He broke a bamboo section, cut it into two, went into the kitchen, smoothed them with a kitchen knife then walked into the room in the west wing. He saw paper, ink, brushes, and inkstones on the table. Putting A'Zhu horizontal on his knees, he ground ink, picked up a brush, and wrote on a piece of bamboo: 'The grave of a rash Khitan Xiao Feng.'

Then he picked up the other piece of bamboo and muttered to himself: 'What do I write, 'The grave of Madam Duan of the Xiao Family'? Though she and I had a promise of marriage, we haven't got married. At her death she was still a young lady who was pure like jade and clear like ice. Wouldn't calling her 'Madam' mean disrespect to her?'

Temporarily unable to decide, he raised his head and considered for a while. By chance, he saw a calligraphic

scroll hanging on the wall. It had quite a few columns of words. He conveniently read from the top down:

We are too bashful and drunk to sing,  
Your elegant hands fasten fragrant silk.  
Leaning on the flower in the candlelight,  
I secretly pass on my deep thoughts.  
The aroma of wine has risen to your eyes.  
Mistaking red for emerald, I am in a daze,  
Lovingly turning around,  
You wrinkle your eyebrows.  
Meeting awhile but long we shall part.  
The spring has ended again,  
How melancholy!

As he was not a learned man, the words he knew were limited. However, this poem did not have any difficult character, so he could see that it was a romantic amorous poem. It seemed the poem talked about drinking wine, getting shy, singing, how the people in the poem met each other for a while but would separate for a long time, and how sad they felt about that. He looked confusedly at the scroll and was in no mood to understand what the poem was about. He only absent-mindedly read it from start to finish. And he saw two rows of words written below the poem: 'A record of the visit I paid Zhu mei (~ my dear Zhu) in my youth to supplement the wall. Having a partner with eyes bright like stars and a waist slender like a bamboo in my company, I have lost my awareness of Heaven and Earth, years and months. Duan the Second of Dali scrawling in his intoxication.'

Xiao Feng mumbled: 'He was really happy. Having a partner with eyes bright like stars and a waist slender like a bamboo in his company, he lost his awareness of Heaven and Earth, years and months. Duan the Second of Dali scrawled in his intoxication. Duan the Second of Dali, hum, so this scroll was written by Duan Zhengchun to give his lover Ruan Xingzhu, and was also about the affair between

A'Zhu's father and mother. How can they hang it openly here? Have they no shame? Ah, that's right. Duan Zhengchun's subordinates can't come in this room.'

At once, he stopped paying attention to the scroll, thinking: 'What should I write on A'Zhu's grave tablet?' He knew that with his shallow command of language, even if he considered more, he would not come up with anything. So he wrote four words 'The grave of A'Zhu'. Then he put the brush down and rose to his feet. He wanted to plant the bamboo tablets before the holes, bury A'Zhu carefully then commit suicide.

He turned around and carried A'Zhu's body in his arms. His eyes caught sight of the scroll on the wall again. Suddenly he jumped up and exclaimed: 'A'yo'. Then he said loudly: 'Wrong, wrong, this matter is wrong!'

He took one step towards the scroll and looked at the several rows of words on it again. He saw that the handwriting was round, smooth, elegant and unconstrained. It seemed as if there was a voice saying loudly in his mind: 'That letter! The letter the leading big brother wrote to Chief Wang--its words ain't like this. They're totally different to this.'

Having only a limited knowledge of characters, he should not be able to recognize a person's handwriting. But the characters on this scroll were beautiful and skillful, and had neat spacing. The characters on that letter, on the other hand, were skewed and angular. At first sight, anybody could know that it was the handwriting of a man of martial arts in jianghu. The difference between the two styles of writing really was so big that anyone could recognize it. He gazed at the characters on the scroll with his eyes wide open. It seemed he wanted to look for the big secrets and big schemes hidden in these several rows of characters.

His mind was in a whirl and full of thoughts of the letter that he had seen in the apricot forest outside the city of Wuxi that evening--the letter that the leading big brother

wrote to Chief Wang. Venerable Zhiguang had torn off the signature of the letter and swallowed it into his stomach to make him unable to know who had written the letter. But the handwriting of the letter had been engraved deeply and very clearly on his mind. The writer of the letter and 'Duan the Second of Dali' who wrote this scroll were definitely not the same person. There was absolutely no doubt about it.

But could the 'leading big brother' entrust the task of writing the letter to another person? After pondering a little, he knew this was definitely impossible. Because Duan Zhengchun was capable of easily writing this kind of nice-looking characters, he certainly was a man who was familiar with penmanship. If he wanted to write a letter to Chief Wang to discuss such an important matter, what reasons could he have to ask another person to write the letter on his behalf? And he had no reason to ask another person to write an amorous poem for his own lover on his behalf.

The more he thought, the more doubtful he became. He thought repeatedly: 'Could it be that leading big brother isn't Duan Zhengchun? Could it be this scroll wasn't written by Duan Zhengchun? Impossible, impossible, besides Duan Zhengchun, how can there be another 'Duan the Second of Dali' who wrote this kind of amorous poem and hung it here? Could it be Madame Ma lied? That's also impossible. She and Duan Zhengchun don't know each other, one in the North, one in the South, one is a widow of a rustic fellow, and one is a member of the nobility. What enmity between them can there be that she could make up lies on purpose to trick me?'

After he had known that the 'leading big brother' was Duan Zhengchun, all the doubts and suspicions in his mind had been swept away, and he had only been thinking about how to get revenge. At this moment, when he saw the calligraphic scroll, all kinds of doubts and suspicions emerged in his mind: 'If that letter wasn't written by Duan Zhengchun, then the leading big brother isn't him. If it's not



him, then who's the leading big brother? Why did Madame Ma wanna lie to other people? What cunning schemes and conspiracies are there in this? I killed A'Zhu by mistake. But A'Zhu was willing to die for me. This way, a layer of unredressed wrong has been added to her unredressed wrong. Why didn't I see this scroll before? But this scroll has been hung in a room in the wings, how could I see it? If I had died to follow A'Zhu without seeing it, that would've been a case of death ending all troubles. Why didn't I see it earlier or later? Why did I see it just a short while before my death?'

The setting sun was about to disappear behind the mountains. The last sunbeams gradually got away from his insteps. Suddenly he heard two people advancing towards the bamboo forest from the side of the Little Mirror Lake. These two people were still far. Concentrating his mind and listening, he noticed that the incoming people were two women. He thought: 'Probably A'Zi and her mother are coming. Hum, I want to ask Madam Duan if this scroll was written by Duan Zhengchun. Of course she extremely hates me for killing A'Zhu. She surely wants to kill me. I... I...' At first he wanted to 'strike back under no circumstances', but he immediately changed his mind: 'If A'Zhu really died unjustly, then it's another person who killed my father and mother, and so this prime villain has borne one more blood debt, and one more life. Could it be that A'Zhu wasn't harmed to death by him? If I don't settle this score, how will I be able to die easily?'

He heard the two women draw closer and closer and go into the bamboo forest. Then, after a short while, he also heard the sounds of their conversation. One woman said: 'Be careful. This harlot doesn't have good martial arts but she's up to all cunning tricks.' The other woman, who was young, replied: 'She's all by herself. Mom, you and I will always be able to finish her off.' The considerably older woman said: 'Say no more. Once we go into action, let's use the most dangerous skills. There's no need to hesitate.' The young

woman said: 'If father knows...' That senior woman said: 'Humph, you still call him father?' After that, there was no sound of talking, but he heard the two women going with stealthy steps. One of them went to the main entrance, and the other went to the back of the house. Apparently they wanted to jointly attack from the front and the rear.

Xiao Feng was rather mystified, thinking: 'Judging from their voices, these two women aren't Ruan Xingzhu and A'Zi. But they're a mother and a daughter, too. They've come here to kill a lone woman. Oh, probably they want to kill Ruan Xingzhu. But that girl's father disapproves of this.' This matter had flashed through his mind, but he did not paid attention to it any longer. He was still sitting in a trance.

After quite a while, a creaky 'ya' sound was heard as someone shoved open the door and came in. Xiao Feng did not raise his head the least. He saw a pair of fine feet in black shoes walked up to him and stopped at a distance of about four Chi (33.33 cm). After that, the side window was pushed open and a person leaped in and stood next to him. Hearing the sound of that person's leap, he knew they did not excel in martial arts.

Still, he did not raise his head. With A'Zhu in his arms, he pondered deeply: 'The 'leading big brother' is Duan Zhengchun, or is he not? Is there anything unusual in Venerable Zhiguang's words? Did Elder Xu have any cunning scheme? Is there any flaw in Madame Ma's words?' Truly, thoughts were surging up in his mind like tidewater, and he was utterly confused.

He heard the young woman ask: 'Hey, who are you? Where's that harlot Ruan?'

Her voice was cold and her tone was totally disrespectful. Xiao Feng did not pay attention to her. He was only thinking about all kinds of suspicions. The older woman said: 'Is there any connection between you, sir, and that harlot Ruan Xingzhu? Who's this woman to you? Quickly tell.' Xiao Feng still paid no attention to her. The young woman said loudly:

‘Are you deaf or dumb? Why don’t you say a word?’ Her tone was brimming with anger. Still, Xiao Feng ignored her and kept sitting motionless like a stone statue.

That young woman made a stamp. The long sword in her hand slightly shook, and the blade shook. With a buzzing noise, she thrust the sword at Xiao Feng’s temple at an angle. When its tip was only several Cun (3.333 cm) away from his temple, she shouted: ‘If you keep acting the fool, I’ll let you taste a bit of misery.’

Xiao Feng was in a very dangerous situation but he did not care about it in the least. He was only considering all kinds of unanswered doubts and suspicions. That young girl slightly pushed her arm forwards. The long sword was thrust forwards, and it went past the side of his neck at a distance of around one cun. Xiao Feng heard clearly the approaching direction of the sword, so he did not dodge or parry it, as if he was totally unaware of it. The two women looked at each other in amazement. The young girl said: ‘Mom, could this fellow be an idiot? The girl he was carrying seems to be dead already.’ The woman said: ‘He’s probably acting like a fool. There can’t be any good thing in the house of this harlot. Give him a hack of the saber first. Then we’ll torture and interrogate him.’ Just as she finished saying, she brought the saber in her left hand down on Xiao Feng’s shoulder.

Xiao Feng waited until the saber was half a chi away from his shoulder to turn over his right hand, stretch it out forwards and catch the back of the blade with two of his fingers. The saber seemed to be fixed to the air and stopped coming down. He slightly pressed forwards with his fingers. The handle of the saber at once hit an important acupuncture point on the shoulder of that woman, rendering her immobile. Then, conveniently, he slightly shook his hand, his internal energy was channelled in the blade, and the steel saber was snapped in two with a ‘pai’ sound. He tossed the section in his hand on the floor conveniently. All along, he did not raise his head and look at the woman.

The young girl, seeing that her mother had been subdued by him, was very frightened. She leaped backwards. Continuous 'chi-chi' sounds were heard as she shot seven short arrows at him. Xiao Feng picked up the broken saber and knocked all the arrows down with one stroke. Then he slightly waved his hand, and the broken saber flew out. With a 'pai' sound, the handle of the saber hit her waist. 'Ah,' that young girl cried. An acupuncture point of hers had been hit squarely. And she was immediately rendered motionless.

That woman asked in fright: 'Are you injured?' The young girl replied: 'My waist is hurting a lot, but I'm not injured. Mom, he's blocked my 'Jingmen acupuncture point.' The woman said: 'He hit my 'Zhongfu acupuncture point'. This... this fellow's martial arts are very formidable.' The young girl said: 'Mom, who is this fellow? How could he best the two of us without standing up? I think he probably used some evil technique.'

The woman dared not be fierce anymore. She said to Xiao Feng mildly: 'There's no enmity between me, my daughter and you, sir. Just now we went into action rashly and offended you. It was our fault. I pray that you are magnanimous and will go easy on us.' The young girl hastily said: 'No, no, we've been defeated, that's all. Why should we ask for forgiveness? I don't like it. If you have the guts then just kill me with a hack of the saber.'

Xiao Feng vaguely heard the words of the mother and her daughter. He only knew that the mother had begged for mercy and the daughter was very stubborn, but he paid no attention to what they had said, not even a single sentence.

By now it was already pitch-dark inside the house. After a while, it got completely dark. Xiao Feng had always sat at the original place, carrying A'Zhu and not making a move. Ordinarily he was very quick-witted, and when encountering difficulties, he had always been very fast in decision-making. If there was something that he was unable to understand, he would put it aside at once and temporarily ignore it, and he

would definitely not hesitate or waver. But having accidentally killed A'Zhu today, he was exceedingly grieved and had become dazed and benighted. It seemed as if he was just a demented madman.

That woman said in a low voice: 'Try to rush your internal energy to the Huantiao acupuncture point. Maybe that would affect the channels and you'd be able to open the blocked acupuncture point.' The young girl said: 'I already tried it. Totally useless...' The woman suddenly said: 'Hush! Someone is coming!'

The crunch of footsteps was heard. Then someone pushed the door open and came in. It was also a woman. With several 'ca-ca' sounds, that woman used a fire-striking knife and a flint to set the kindling afire. Next she lit the oil lamp. When she turned around and suddenly saw Xiao Feng, A'Zhu, and the two women, she could not help exclaiming an 'Ah' sound. Never could she have thought that there were other people in the house. So, when suddenly seeing four people, either sitting or standing, of whom all were being motionless, she jumped out of her skin at once. Her hands loosened and the fire-striking knife and the flint dropped, making two clanking noises.

Suddenly, the woman who had entered the house earlier shouted severely: 'Ruan Xingzhu, it's you!'

The woman who had just entered the house was none other than Ruan Xingzhu. Turning around, she saw that the person who had just talked was a middle-aged woman with a young girl, who was wearing only black clothes, beside her. These two people were rather beautiful, especially the young girl. But she had never seen both of them. Ruan Xingzhu said: 'Right, I'm Ruan. Who are you two?'

The middle-aged woman did not answer. She only continuously looked at her carefully. Her face was full of fury.

Ruan Xingzhu turned around and said to Xiao Feng: 'Chief Qiao, you already killed my daughter, what are you

still doing here? My... my... my poor daughter!' As she finished saying, she wept loudly and rushed to A'Zhu's body.

Xiao Feng kept sitting in a daze. After a good while, he said: 'Madam Duan, my sin is very serious. I beg you to draw a knife and kill me.'

Ruan Xingzhu sobbed: 'Even if I killed you with a slash of the knife, I wouldn't be able to revive my poor daughter. Chief Qiao, you said I and A'Zhu's father made a blunder that we've been ashamed of and harmed a child to the point of being wretched for life and not knowing its own parents. These words are true. But... if you wanted to defend somebody against an injustice, you should've found Prince Duan and killed him. Why did you kill my A'Zhu?'

In this moment, Xiao Feng's mind was rather slow. Only after a short while did he shiver with fear in his heart, asking: 'What's the blunder that you've been ashamed of?' Ruan Xingzhu wept, saying: 'You already know clearly. Why do you insist on asking me? Both A'Zhu... A'Zhu and A'Zi are my daughters. I didn't dare bring them home so I gave them to other people.'

Xiao Feng said in a quavering voice: 'Yesterday I asked Duan Zhengchun if he had made a blunder that he'd been ashamed of. He admitted frankly. So this shameful matter was only giving A'Zhu... and A'Zi to strangers?' Ruan Xingzhu said angrily: 'I already did this shameful thing, how can it still be insufficient? What bad kind of woman who specializes in doing shameful things do you think I am?' Xiao Feng said: 'Yesterday Duan Zhengchun also said 'Heaven has shown pity on me and today allows me to meet a... a parentless child of that year again.' When he said now he had met this parentless child again, he was talking about A'Zi, and not... and not me?' Ruan Xingzhu said angrily: 'Why should he want to talk about you? Are you the child he abandoned to other people? You... What rot are you talking? Could I give birth to an animal like you?' She detested Xiao

Feng, but afraid of his outstanding martial arts she dared not go into action and only scolded him.

Xiao Feng said: 'Then, when I asked why he has still continuously committed one wrongdoing after another since, why did he admit that his conduct had been improper and his virtue had been deficient?' Ruan Xingzhu's cheeks, which were being covered with tears, slightly reddened. She said: 'He has a loose nature. It's always been so. After he's played around with one woman, he'd play around with the second woman, the third woman, the fourth woman, debauching himself with one after another, but... who needs you to meddle in other people's business?'

Xiao Feng mumbled: 'Wrong, wrong, completely wrong!' After being in a daze for a long time, suddenly he stretched out his hand and slapped himself heavily in the face, making continuous pai-pai-pai-pai sounds. Frightened, Ruan Xingzhu jumped to her feet and retreated some steps. She only saw that Xiao Feng kept beating himself with all his strength and every blow of the palm was very heavy. After a short while, his cheeks had already swollen up considerably.

Then, a soft 'ya' sound was heard as someone else pushed the door open and came in. This person cried: 'Mom, have you taken that scroll...' She was none other than A'Zi. Before she had finished saying, she saw other people in the house, and saw Xiao Feng was repeatedly beating himself with his right hand while carrying A'Zhu with his left hand. So she could not help being so frightened that she was dumbfounded.

Xiao Feng cheeks swelled then their skin broke. After that, his face and his hand were full of fresh blood, then blood spattered ceaselessly on the walls, the table, the chairs... Everything was spattered with blood. Even A'Zhu's body and that scroll hanging on the wall were also covered with small red drops of blood.

Because Ruan Xingzhu could not bear to see this brutal sight, she covered up her eyes with both hands. However,

she still heard the continuous 'pai-pai' sounds, so she called out: 'Don't beat anymore, don't beat anymore!'

A'Zi squealed: 'Hey, don't dirty the words my father wrote, or I'll ask you for compensation.'

She jumped onto the table, stretched out her hands and took the scroll that was hanging on the wall. It turned out she and her mother returned only to fetch this calligraphic scroll.

Startled, Xiao Feng stopped beating and asked: 'Is this 'Duan the Second of Dali' really Duan Zhengchun?' Ruan Xingzhu countered: 'Other than him, whom else?' When she mentioned Duan Zhengchun's name, she could not help showing a feeling of passionate pride on her face.

These several words cleared up a doubt in Xiao Feng's mind: This scroll was really written by Duan Zhengchun. That letter to Chief Wang was not written by him. And so the leading big brother probably is not Duan Zhengchun.

A thought immediately emerged in his mind: 'There must be very important secret facts in Madame Ma's setting up Duan Zhengchun. I should untie this knot first, and everything will come to light.' As he thought so, his intention of committing suicide disappeared at once. The beating he had given himself just now had left his face covered with fresh blood, but thanks to it, he had been able to vent the remorse and sorrow in his heart. Thereupon, he rose, carrying A'Zhu's body in his arms.

A'Zi, having seen the two bamboo tablets he had written on the table, said laughingly: 'Ha-ha, no wonder I saw two holes outside. I've been puzzled. So you want to die and be buried together with my sister? Well, well, well, you're really too passionate!'

Xiao Feng replied: 'I accidentally fell into the cruel trap of a villain and harmed A'Zhu to death. Now I must find that villain and avenge her first. Then I'll follow her to the Underworld.' A'Zi asked: 'Who's that villain?' Xiao Feng replied: 'At the moment I have no clue. I'll go investigate



this.' As he finished, he went out with large strides, carrying A'Zhu. A'Zi laughed and said: 'Are you going to find the villain while carrying my sister like this?'

Xiao Feng was slightly nonplussed. Temporarily, he had no idea. He thought if he carried A'Zhu's body to go on a thousand-li long journey, it would eventually be improper, but it was difficult for him to let go of her because he was really attached to her. He looked at A'Zhu's face in a daze. Tears rolled straight down his gory damaged face. Mixed with fresh blood, the tears became reddish drops and fell onto A'Zhu's pale face. Truly, this was dripping with tears of blood.

When Ruan Xingzhu saw his heartrending situation, all her abhorrence of him vanished in an instant. She said: 'Chief Qiao, this blunder was already done. It's already impossible to redeem. You... you...' Originally she wanted to advise him to restrain his grief, but she herself could not refrain from bursting into tears. She said tearfully: 'It's all because I'm no good. It's all because I'm no good... Why did I give my nice daughter to other people?'

Suddenly, the young girl who had been rendered motionless by Xiao Feng interrupted: 'Of course it's all because you're no good! Other people were being happy husband and wife, why did you come and break up their family?'

Ruan Xingzhu raised her head and asked the young girl: 'Why do you say that, Miss? Who are you?'

The young girl replied: 'You're a fox spirit (~ a wanton woman). You've made my mother so miserable. You harmed me... harmed me...'

A'Zi stretched out her hand to slap her in the face. Unable to move, that young girl saw the incoming blow of the palm, but she could not dodge it.

Ruan Xingzhu hurriedly held out her hand and pulled A'Zi's arm, saying: 'A'Zi, you can't act rudely.' Then she turned to the middle-aged woman and surveyed her. Seeing

that the woman was holding a steel saber in her right hand and there was broken saber on the floor, she suddenly understood, so she said: 'That's right. You use two sabers. You... You're Sura Saber Qin... Qin Hongmian... elder sister Qin.'

This middle-aged woman was none other than another lover of Duan Zhengchun's--Sura Saber Qin Hongmian, and the young girl wearing black clothes was her daughter Mu Wanqing. Qin Hongmian did not blame Duan Zhengchun for having love affairs everywhere, but she loathed the other women for being prurient and seductive and snatching her beau. Therefore, after receiving a message from her shimei (younger female fellow disciple) Gan Baobao, she and her daughter Mu Wanqing had at once gone to assassinate Duan Zhengchun's wife Dao Baifeng and another lover of his, with the result that they had failed to kill either. When she learned that Duan Zhengchun had another mistress called Ruan Xingzhu, who was living in seclusion beside the Little Mirror Lake, she immediately took her daughter along to go to kill this woman.

Qin Hongmian, seeing that Ruan Xingzhu had recognized herself, shouted: 'Right, I'm Qin Hongmian, who needs a harlot like you to call me elder sister?'

Temporarily, Ruan Xingzhu was unable to guess why Qin Hongmian had come here. She was also afraid that if this love rival and Duan Zhengchun met each other, they would rekindle their old feelings, so she laughed and said: 'That's right. I said incorrectly. You're much younger than me, and you have such a great beauty too. No wonder Duan lang (~ dear Duan) is so fascinated by you. You're my younger sister, not elder sister. Younger sister Qin, Duan lang misses you every day. You're engraved upon his mind. I really envy you your good fortune.'

When Qin Hongmian heard Ruan Xingzhu praise her for being young and beautiful, the anger in her heart disappeared three-tenths. And when she heard Ruan

Xingzhu say that Duan Zhengchun missed her every day, her anger disappeared another three-tenths. She said: 'Who wants you to sweet talk like this? You're sure used to flattering other people.'

Ruan Xingzhu said: 'This young lady is your precious daughter, right? Well, well, well, younger sister Qin, it's a hard job to give birth to such a beauty...'

Noticing that the two women were harping on about romantic matters, Xiao Feng became impatient and did not want to hear more. As a straightforward and resolute fellow, after the heartbreaking sorrow was gone, he at once pondered how to handle important businesses in the future.

Carrying A'Zhu's body, he walked to the side of a hole and set her down in it. He grabbed the soil with his pair of big hands and slowly scattered it on her body. But all along he did not scatter soil on her face.

He looked at A'Zhu without blinking. With just several more handfuls of soil scattered on her, he would never be able to see her again. His ears seemed to vaguely hear her voice promising to go outside Yanmen Pass to ride on horseback, go hunting, pasture cattle and sheep, and be with him for life. Less than one day before, she had still been saying these words which sometimes were affectionate, sometimes were witty, sometimes were serious, and sometimes were mischievous. But from today on, he would never hear them again. From now on, the vow to pasture cattle and sheep at the frontier had come to naught.

Xiao Feng knelt beside the grave for a very long time. But still, he was unwilling to scatter soil on A'Zhu's face.

Suddenly he rose. With a long howl, he stopped looking at A'Zhu and pushed out his two hands at the same time, shoving all the soil beside the grave onto her body and face. Then he turned around and walked into the room in the wing.

He saw Ruan Xingzhu and Qin Hongmian were still talking unceasingly. Even though Ruan Xingzhu was being

grieved, she was still artfully persuasive in speech and made Qin Hongmian totally pleased. The enmity between the two women had already been removed. Ruan Xingzhu said: 'Chief Qiao, this younger sister of mine offended you, but it was unintentional. I beg you to unblock their acupuncture points.'

Ruan Xingzhu was A'Zhu's mother so Xiao Feng certainly listened to her to a reasonable extent, let alone the fact that he already wanted to release these two people. At once, he came near, stretched out his hands and gave Qin Hongmian and Mu Wanqing a tap each on their shoulders. The two of them only felt a stream of internal energy run from their shoulders to their blocked acupuncture points. In an instant, they were already able to move their limbs freely as usual. The mother and the daughter exchanged a look. In their hearts, they exceedingly admired Xiao Feng for the depth of his internal energy.

Xiao Feng turned to A'Zi and said: 'Younger sister A'Zi, could you please let me have a look at your father's calligraphic scroll?'

A'Zi said: 'I don't want you to call me younger sister this, younger sister that.' Despite saying so, she dared not disobey him and still handed the scroll over to him.

Xiao Feng unfolded the scroll and studied the words Duan Zhengchun had written several times again. Ruan Xingzhu's face turned a deep red all over. She said bashfully: 'What's so interesting about these things?' Xiao Feng asked: 'Where's Prince Duan, now?' Ruan Xingzhu's face changed color greatly. She retreated several steps and said in a tremulous voice: 'Don't... don't... don't go find him again.' Xiao Feng said: 'I won't find to make things difficult for him. I only want to ask him some things.' Ruan Xingzhu of course was unwilling to believe him. So she said: 'You already accidentally killed A'Zhu. You shouldn't find him again.'

Xiao Feng knew that by no means would she be willing to say, so he did not ask her anymore. He rolled up the scroll,

returned it to A'Zi and said: 'With her last words, A'Zhu told me to take care of her younger sister. Madam Duan, later on, if A'Zi encounters any difficulty, as long as Xiao Feng can offer any help, just tell me, I definitely won't decline.'

Ruan Xingzhu was very glad, thinking: 'If A'Zi has a supporter of great abilities like him, in her life, misfortune will turn into luckiness and accidents will turn into good things.' So she said: 'I thank you very much, then. A'Zi, quickly thank big brother Qiao.' She changed 'Chief Qiao' to 'big brother Qiao' to make A'Zi and him become closer.

A'Zi immediately pouted her lips and said with a scornful expression: 'What difficulty will I have to ask him to help? I have a master who is without equal under Heaven and many shixions (older male fellow disciples), why should I be afraid of being bullied by someone? He's like a clay Bodhisattva fording a river, unable to protect himself. He can't handle his own matters and only makes mistakes, how can he still want to help me with my problems? Humph, the more he'll help, the more problems he'll create, won't he?' She let out a torrent of words with her clear and carefree voice. Several times Ruan Xingzhu gave her hints with the eyes to stop her, but A'Zi pretended that she did not see them.

Ruan Xingzhu stamped her feet and said: 'Alas, this child makes insolent irresponsible remarks. Chief Qiao, please show some consideration for A'Zhu and don't take offence at them.' Xiao Feng said: 'My surname is Xiao, not Qiao.' A'Zi said: 'Mom, this fellow doesn't even know his own surname. He's a big idiot...' Ruan Xingzhu shouted: 'A'Zi!'

Xiao Feng took a bow with his hands folded, saying: 'I must now bid you farewell.' Then he turned to Mu Wanqing and said: 'Miss Duan, don't use these poisonous missiles of yours anymore. They are useless. On the contrary, if you meet an enemy of better skills, you'll unavoidably be harmed by them.'

Before Mu Wanqing had replied, A'Zi said: 'Elder sister, don't listen to his nonsense. At worst these missiles will miss the enemy, what harms can they have?'

Paying no attention to her, Xiao Feng turned around and walked out. When his left foot passed through the door, he took a swing with his right sleeve, causing a gust of wind with a buzzing sound. All the seven short arrows that Mu Wanqing had shot at him earlier and had been knocked down by him got off the floor at the same time and flew fiercely towards A'Zi like lightning. 'Aiyo,' A'Zi only uttered an exclamation. How could she dodge in time? The seven short arrows skimmed across the top of her head, the sides of her neck and the sides of her body before, with a 'pai' sound, sticking deep up to the feathers in the wall behind her simultaneously.

Ruan Xingzhu hastily rushed forwards, embraced A'Zi and cried in fear: 'Younger sis Qin, quickly take out the antidote.' Qin Hongmian said: 'Where's she wounded? Where's she wounded?' Mu Wanqing hastily took the antidote out from her bosom and went to examine the condition of A'Zi's injuries.

After a short while, A'Zi somewhat regained her composure. Only then did she say: 'They... they didn't hit me.' Then the four women looked at the seven short arrows on the wall at the same time, and all of them gasped with astonishment and their faces changed color.

It turned out Xiao Feng remembered A'Zhu's last words, which asked him to take care of A'Zi, but he heard her say 'I have a master who is without equal under Heaven and many shixions, why should I be afraid of being bullied by someone?' For this reason, he swept away the arrows with the wind of his sleeve and gave her a scare, lest the little girl, who was ignorant of the immensity of the world and impertinent due to her strong backing insomuch that she looked down on the heroes and bold men under Heaven, unavoidably suffered in the future.

He walked out of the bamboo forest, went to the side of the Little Mirror Lake, found a big tree with luxuriant branches and foliage, and jumped onto it. He wanted to find Duan Zhengchun to ask clearly why Madame Ma deliberately cast the blame on him, but Ruan Xingzhu simply was unwilling to reveal his whereabouts, so he himself had no choice but to follow in secret.

Before long, he saw the four women come out. Qin Hongmian and daughter went ahead of Ruan Xingzhu and her daughter. It looked like Ruan Xingzhu was seeing the guests out.

The four women walked to the side of the lake. Qin Hongmian said: 'Elder sister Ruan, you and I feel like old friends at the first meeting. Because the former ill will between us has been dispelled, a matter of hatred in my mind has been eliminated. Now I want to go find that lowly slave surnamed Kang. Do you know where she is?' Startled, Ruan Xingzhu asked: 'Younger sister, why do you want to find her?' Qin Hongmian said resentfully: 'Originally I and Duan lang were living happy days. It was all because of the tricks of this lowly slavish fox spirit...' Ruan Xingzhu thought for a little while and said: 'That Kang... this harlot Kang Min, hum, I don't know where she is. When you've found her, please give her several more stabs of the saber on my behalf.' Qin Hongmian said: 'That goes without saying. I'm just afraid it won't be easy to find her. Alright, see you later! Humph, if you meet Duan lang...' Ruan Xingzhu slightly shivered and said: 'What should I do?' Qin Hongmian said: 'You give him two heavy slaps in the face for me, one slap to settle my account, and one slap to settle my daughter's account.'

Ruan Xingzhu laughed gently and said: 'How can I meet this heartless damnable fellow? Younger sister, when you see him, give him two slaps in the face for me as well, one for me, and one for A'Zi. No, slapping won't be enough. Next you give him two kicks for me. He fathered his daughters

but didn't take care of them, making me and my daughter so wretched and lonely...' As she finished, she shed tears. Qin Hongmian consoled: 'Sister, don't be sad. After we've killed that harlot Kang, we'll return to be your companions.'

Xiao Feng, hiding on the tree, heard very clearly the conversation between the two women. He thought that Duan Zhengchun was not bad at martial arts and rather benevolent and loyal to his friends, but he had abandoned himself to his love of feminine beauty, so he did not count as a hero. He saw Qin Hongmian pull Mu Wanqing, salute Ruan Xingzhu and her daughter and leave at once, then Ruan Xingzhu held A'Zi hand and went back into the bamboo forest.

Xiao Feng considered: 'Ruan Xingzhu sure will go find Duan Zhengchun, but she's unwilling to go together with Qin Hongmian, that's all. She said that she came to take this scroll so Duan Zhengchun is definitely waiting not far up ahead. I'm just going to observe from here.'

Suddenly there were soft sounds in a thicket, and two people in black clothes quietly walked out, but they were Qin Hongmian and her daughter returning. He heard Qin Hongmian say in a low voice: 'Wan'er, how could you be so careless and easily tricked by them? There's a pair of male shoes under the couch in Elder Sister Ruan's bedroom. The toe caps are embroidered with two words, the left shoe has the word 'Mountain', and the right shoe has the word 'River.' Of course they're your father's shoes. The shoes are very new, and the mud on their sole isn't dry yet. Obviously your father is near here.' Mu Wanqing said: 'Ah! So this woman surnamed Ruan fooled us.' Qin Hongmian said: 'Yes, how can she be willing to let that unfaithful fellow meet us?' Mu Wanqing said: 'Father has no conscience. Mom, you need not meet him.'

After keeping silent for quite a while, Qin Hongmian said: 'I want to see him, but I don't want to meet him. We've been separate for so many days, he's already old, and your



mother's already old too.' These few sentences were very simple, but the words contained deep emotions.

Mu Wanqing said: 'Alright!' Her voice sounded very sorrowful. Ever since she and Duan Yu had parted company, her memory of him had grown day by day, but knowing clearly this was a love that would go nowhere, she dared not show the load on her mind before her mother.

Qin Hongmian said: 'We only need to keep watch from here. I think your father will arrive soon.' As she finished, she pushed the long grass apart and hid herself in it. After that, Mu Wanqing hid behind a tree.

In the dull starlight, Xiao Feng saw that Qin Hongmian's pale face was slightly red. Obviously she was deeply stirred. He thought: 'Love wears people out to such an extent.' But he also immediately thought of A'Zhu, and could not help feeling a burst of pain in his chest.

Not long after, quick footsteps were heard on the path. Xiao Feng thought: 'This person isn't Duan Zhengchun. Probably his subordinate.' Sure enough, when that person rushed near him, he recognized that it was Zhu Danchen, the fellow who had drawn in reverse on the bridge.

Ruan Xingzhu had already heard the footsteps, but she was unable to know who this person was. She only thought that it was Duan Zhengchun, so she called: 'Duan lang, Duan lang!' and quickly came out to meet him. A'Zi came out with her.

Zhu Danchen bowed down to the ground, saying: 'My Lord has ordered this subordinate to report that he has an urgent matter so he is unable to return today.'

Startled, Ruan Xingzhu asked: 'What's the matter? When will he return?' Zhu Danchen replied: 'This matter is related to the Murong Family of Gusu. It seems the whereabouts of Mister Murong has been discovered. My Lord has gone north on a ten-thousand-li journey to find this man. My Lord said that: After handling his important matter, he would return to the side of the Little Mirror Lake at once for a reunion.'

Madame needs not worry.' Tears welling up in her eyes, Ruan Xingzhu said in a voice choked with emotions: 'He's always said he'd return at once, but everytime he wouldn't see me for three years or five years. I had a really hard time waiting for him to come here, yet...'

Zhu Danchen was exceedingly upset and indignant about how A'Zi had angered Chu Wanli to death. Duan Zhengchun's words had been passed on, so he was unwilling to remain here any longer. He bow slightly, turned around and left. From start to finish, he did not cast a look at A'Zi.

Ruan Xingzhu, waiting until he had gone, said to A'Zi in a low voice: 'Your lightness skill is much better than mine. Quickly follow him, and leave identification marks on the way for me. I'll follow soon after.' A'Zi pouted her lips, laughed and said: 'You ask me to trail father, so what's the reward?' Ruan Xingzhu said: 'Everything Mom has is already yours. What reward do you still want?' A'Zi said: 'Alright, I'll write a 'Duan' character on the corners of the walls then draw an arrow so that you'd know.' Ruan Xingzhu hugged her daughter's shoulders and said with gladness: 'Good daughter!' A'Zi laughed and said: 'Infatuated mommy!' Then she raised herself up and chased after Zhu Danchen.

Ruan Xingzhu stood beside the Little Mirror Lake for a long time. Then she went along the small path. As soon as she had gone, Qin Hongmian and her daughter successively appeared. The two of them made gestures with their hands and followed behind her.

Xiao Feng thought: 'A'Zi already leaves signs on the way. It'll be very easy to find Duan Zhengchun.' When he had taken several steps, suddenly, in the moonlight, he saw his own reflection in the lake. He felt sad, disappointed, and very lonely, and his heart ached. He wanted to return to the bamboo forest to sit in front of A'Zhu's grave again for a while. However, in an instant, his heroic spirit surged up, and he sent out a blow of the palm. The energy wind of his attack hit the lake and splashed water all around. The

reflection in the lake also turned into a mass of fragments. With a long howl, he left with big strides.

During the several days later, he set out at daybreak and slept at night, drinking very much, but eating little. Every time he arrived in a town, he saw a 'Duan' character and an arrow showing the direction left by A'Zi at the foot of a wall. Sometimes Ruan Xingzhu, after seeing them, scraped them off, but the vestige of the signs could still be recognized.

On the way to the north, it gradually got cold. That day, not long after he had gone outside, it started to snow heavily. Snowflakes floated to and fro, up and down in the air. Xiao Feng kept going until noon. Then he went into a small wine shop and consumed twelve or thirteen bowls of spirit. When his addiction to wine had not yet been slaked, the shop was already out of wine. Very disappointed, he ran for a while with big strides and came towards a big city. As he drew near, he was slightly shocked. It turned out he had arrived in Xinyang.

On the way he had only searched for the signs left by A'Zi, and thought of his own worries, so he had paid no attention to his surroundings, insomuch that he had unexpectedly returned to Xinyang. If he really wanted to find Duan Zhengchun, it would be as easy as rasing his hand. Only rushing faster in one day or half a day and he would definitely catch up with Duan Zhengchun. But ever since the death of A'Zhu, his mind had always been empty. He did not know how he should pass the time. In his mind, he had always thought: 'What should I do after catching up with Duan Zhengchun? When I've found the prime villain and got revenge, what should I do? When I've returned to the outside of Yanmen Pass alone to go hunting and pasture sheep in the great desert of wind and sand, what should I do?' As a result, he had not been in hot pursuit all along.

After entering the city of Xinyang, he saw a 'Duan' character written in charcoal at the foot of the city wall. Beside the character was an arrow pointing westward. He

felt a burst of distress in his mind as he recalled that day he and A'Zhu, side by side, had gone to Madame Ma's house in the west of the city of Xinyang to tactfully sound her out. Today, thinking back, he felt that every step at that time had pushed A'Zhu closer to the Underworld by one step.

After he had gone five or six li (0.5 km), the north wind became fierce, and the snow fell more heavily.

Following the signs left by A'Zi, he went westward. These signs were new and had been left not long before. Some of the signs were left by scraping away the bark of trees and writing on them. On the holes, the resin at the places scraped by the knife had not yet congealed. The direction of the signs was none other than Ma Dayuan's house. Xiao Feng was secretly mystified, thinking: 'Could it be that Duan Zhengchun knows Madame Ma framed him, so he finds her to settle the score? That's right, when A'Zhu talked to me in her dying moment at the bluestone bridge, she mentioned Madame Ma. A'Zi heard it, and she must've told her father. But we only said Madame Ma, how can he know that she is this Madame Ma?'

On the way, he had been depressed and rather dazed. But this moment, as he met a very unusual matter, his spirit rose at once, and the vigilance that he had when engaging in battles with strong enemies in former days were restored. Seeing an abandoned shrine by the roadside, he immediately entered it, closed the door, lay down and slept for six hours. Only at the second watch (10 p.m to twelve p.m) did he come out and go towards the house of Ma Dayuan.

When approaching the house, he hid behind a tree and looked carefully at the surroundings. After he had observed for a while, a faint smile appeared at the corners of his mouth because he saw two people hiding on the northeast side of the house of the Ma Family. Judging from appearance, they were Ruan Xingzhu and A'Zi. After that, he saw Qin Hongmian and her daughter hiding in the southeast corner

of the house. In this moment, the heavy snow had not yet ceased so the four women all were piled on with a layer of white snow. A dull yellow light came out through the window of the room in the east wing, and there was only silence. Xiao Feng broke a branch off and threw it to the east. A soft 'pai' sound was heard as it fell on the ground. Ruan Xingzhu and the other three women all looked in the direction of the sound. With a gentle leap, he already arrived at the underside of the window of the room in the east wing.

The weather was cold and the ground was frozen. All the windows of the Ma Family house had wooden boards. Xiao Feng waited for a while. He heard a gust of north wind coming whistling. Waiting until this gust of wind was about to reach the window, he lightly sent out a blow of the palm. His palm force and that gust of wind hit the wooden board of the window at the same time. With a 'ka-la' sound, the wooden board was broken. Even the window paper inside was also left with a crack. Even though the people such as Qin Hongmian and Ruan Xingzhu were in the area around the house, they were not aware of this because the palm wind and the north wind totally coincided with each other. If there was someone in the room, they would not be able to detect this either. Xiao Feng put his eye next to the crack and looked inside. At first sight, he was dumbfounded, as if he did not believe his own eyes.

He saw Duan Zhengchun, wearing a short jacket and a small hat, sitting cross-legged on the edge of the earthen bed, holding a wine cup in his hand, grinning and looking at a woman who was sitting by the side of the small bed table.

That woman was wearing white mourning attire and had a light make-up on. The tips of her eyebrows and the corners of her eyes were brimming with passion. Her pair of watery glistening eyes looked as if they were about to shed water. Like smiling without smiling, like being angry without being angry, she looked sideways at Duan Zhengchun. She was none other than the widow of Ma Dayuan--Madame Ma.



## Chapter 24: An Old Union Under the Candlelight

Fan translation by Xaari [Second Edition]

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If Xiao Feng wasn't personally witnessing the scene at this moment, he would certainly dismiss it as a ridiculous lie if anyone told him about it. After his first time seeing Madame Ma outside Wuxi in the apricot forest, he met her twice more and always felt that she was as cold as ice and frost. She appeared severe and not to be offended, and even her smile was never to be seen. But who would have expected that she would actually become like this? Even more strange was that she had framed Duan Zhengchun with her words, so there must certainly be great enmity and hatred between them. But judging from the atmosphere in the small room, with intoxication and fragrance, delicate passion, the two of them glancing at each other, and a gentle and secret love, how could there be any hatred?

On the table, a large flower vase was filled with red plum blossoms, and a great fire was roaring on the heatable brick bed. The buttons at Madame Ma's neck came loose and exposed the snow white back of her neck and also the edge of her red satin chest garment. Yet the two lit candles by the bed were white, and the red firelight shone on her rosy cheeks. There was wind and snow outside the room, but indoors it was as warm as spring.

He heard Duan Zhengchun say, "Come, drink a cup with me, let's drink enough to become a couple."

Madame Ma snorted and said in a bored voice, "What couple? I'm alone in this cold and desolate place, thinking and hoping day and night, always remembering you, my enemy. But you...you...casted me aside to the back of your

mind. When did you ever think of visiting me?" After saying this, the rims of her eyes became red.

Xiao Feng thought, "She speaks almost like Qin Hongmian and Ruan Xingzhu. Could it be...could it be that she is also Duan Zhengchun's former lover?"

Duan Zhengchun said in a low and soft voice, "When I was in Dali, was there ever a day when I didn't think of you, Little Kang? I wished to grow wings and fly here, hold you in my embrace, and pity you well. That day when I heard the news that you married Deputy Chief Ma, I didn't eat anything for three days and nights. Since you had a home, if I came to visit you again, I would inevitably tire you. Deputy Chief Ma was a hero of great status in the Beggar Clan, so if I did this and that with you again, it would be doing him a great wrong. Wouldn't that...that make me a despicable little man?"

Madame Ma said, "Who wanted you to offer politeness to me? I was only thinking of you, wondering if you were healthy and happy, if all your matters were going smoothly. As long as you were well, I would be happy, and life would be meaningful. You were far away in Dali, so probing for news about you was so difficult. My body was in Xinyang, but when was this heart of mine ever not by your side?"

Her voice became lower and lower, and Xiao Feng felt that amidst the intimacy there was bitterness, softness, and lingering emotions revolving endlessly. Hearing it really took away one's breath, seized one's spirit, and faded one's soul. Yet her words seemed pure and natural, and didn't have any intentional vixen charm. In his life he had indeed met many people, but he hadn't expected that in the world there was actually such a splendidly charming woman. Although Xiao Feng was astonished, his face involuntarily reddened. He had previously met two of Duan Zhengchun's other lovers; Qin Hongmian was bright and straightforward, Ruan Xingzhu was smart and beautiful, and this Madame Ma was extremely gentle and intimate, yet another type.



Duan Chengchun smiled, held out his hand to pull her over, and embraced her. Madame Ma let out an “oh” sound, half willing and half unwillingly, and slightly resisted by shoving with her hands.

Xiao Feng wrinkled his brows, unwilling to watch their shameful performance. Suddenly he heard people beside him treading forcefully on the accumulated snow underfoot, producing a rubbing sound. He thought to himself, “This isn’t good, these two have overturned the vinegar jug (vinegar = jealousy), and will spoil my important matters.” His figure like the wind, he drifted behind Qin Hongmian and the others, and one by one sealed the acupuncture points on the backs of the four.

These four didn’t know who had done it, and were already unable to move a single step. This time Xiao Feng sealed their mute acupuncture point, which caused them to be unable to speak. Qin Hongmian and Ruan Xingzhu heard their lover and the woman beside him sharing words of love. Their fury was like fire, their envy like the tide, but they collapsed on the snowy ground, the two of them suffering torment.

Xiao Feng continued to watch through the slit in the window, and saw that Madame Ma was already sitting beside Duan Zhengchun, her head leaning against his shoulder. Her body seemed as if it had only a few bones, she had trouble supporting herself, and a mass of long black hair draped down, covering half of Duan Zhengchun’s face. Her eyes opened and closed a little, only exposing slits, and she said, “The head of my household was harmed by someone; you should have heard the rumors, but did you not dare come visit me? The head of my household is already dead, so you don’t need to continue avoiding the suspicions!” Her voice was both reproachful and coquettish.

Duan Zhengchun smiled and said, “Didn’t I come already? Once I received the news, I immediately left on the same night, traveling night and day. My horse’s hooves

pounded incessantly as I rushed over from Dali, afraid that I would be late."

Madame Ma asked, "Afraid of what?"

Duan Zhengchun smiled and said, "Afraid that you wouldn't be able to endure the loneliness and would marry someone again. Wouldn't I have rushed here for nothing? You caused me ten years of yearning."

Madame Ma spit and said, "Pei, you don't even know how to say proper words, and set me up as someone who is unable to endure loneliness and marries again? When did you ever think of me, what ten years of yearning, are you not afraid of your tongue rotting?"

Duan Zhengchun held out his arms, embraced her even tighter, and said, "If I didn't yearn for you, then why would I rush over from Dali?"

Madame Ma smiled and said, "Fine, I'll take it that you missed me. Duan Lang, how are you going to arrange for me in the future?" She held out her arms and wrapped them around Duan Zhengchun's neck, placed her cheek on his face, and continuously rubbed softly, her beautiful hair constantly trembling like water ripples.

Duan Zhengchun said, "At present we have wine, at present we'll get drunk. Why mention future matters? Come, let me carry you. After being separated for ten years, have you gotten lighter or heavier?" He picked up Madame Ma.

Madame Ma asked, "Then you're still unwilling to bring me to Dali?"

Duan Zhengchun's brows creased slightly. He said, "What's so good about Dali? It's hot and humid, and malaria is in the air. If you go, you won't be used to the climate and will get sick."

Madame Ma sighed softly and said in a low voice, "Hmm, you're only coaxing me with empty happiness."

Duan Zhengchun smiled and said, "How is it empty happiness? I'll immediately give you true happiness."

Madame Ma struggled slightly and dropped down. She poured a cup of wine and said, "Duan Lang, drink another cup."

Duan Zhengchun said, "I won't drink anymore; I've had enough wine."

Madame Ma's left hand reached over and caressed his face. She said, "No, I won't let you off easily. I want you to get dazedly drunk."

Duan Zhengchun smiled and said, "What's so good about being dazedly drunk?" He took the cup and finished it in one gulp.

Xiao Feng was impatient from listening to their flirtatious talk. When he saw Duan Zhengchun drinking, his wine addiction couldn't help but flare up, and he lightly swallowed his saliva. He saw Duan Zhengchun yawning a few times and looking considerably tired.

Madame Ma smiled enchantingly and said, "Duan Lang, let me tell you a story, all right?"

Xiao Feng's spirits were roused and he thought, "She's going to tell a story; maybe some clues can be found."

But Duan Zhengchun said, "But there's no hurry to talk. Come, I'll take off your clothes, and you can softly tell me by the pillow."

Madame Ma gave him a cold stare and said, "Think of it! Duan Lang, when I was young my family was very poor. I wanted new clothes, but daddy couldn't afford them. All day long I would think, if I could be like neighbor Sister Jiang, who got flowery clothes and shoes at New Year's, then I would be happy."

Duan Zhengchun said, "When you were young you must have definitely been rather pretty. Such a cute little girl, even if you wore ragged clothing, you would be very beautiful."

Madame Ma said, "No, I only loved to wear flowery clothes."

Duan Zhengchun said, "You're wearing snow white mourning clothes and look even smarter. What's so good about flowery clothes?"

Madame Ma said, "You grew up in luxury, and naturally wouldn't understand the suffering of children from poor families. At that time, even if I had a pair of new shoes, I would be exceedingly happy. When I was seven, my daddy told me that on the twelfth month, he would sell our three lambs and fourteen chickens in town for the New Year, and then cut a piece of flowery cloth and sew a set of new clothes for me. Starting from the eighth month when my daddy told me these words, I looked forward to it, and carefully fed the chickens and tended the sheep..."

When Xiao Feng heard the words "tended the sheep," his eyes brimmed with hot tears.

Madame Ma continued, "With great difficulty I waited until the twelfth month, and every day I would urge daddy to sell the sheep and chickens. Daddy always said, 'Don't be so impatient. Near the end of the year, the chickens and sheep will sell for the best price.' After a few days, it snowed heavily for several days and nights. That evening, with a "kualala" sound, the sheep pen collapsed due to the snow. Fortunately the sheep weren't crushed to death. Daddy moved the sheep to one side and said that now the sheep needed to be sold earlier. Unexpectedly, it was in the middle of that night when the sheep cried out and the wolves howled noisily. Daddy said, 'This isn't good, there are wolves!' He carried a spear and went out to drive the wolves away. But the three sheep were being dragged by the hungry wolves, and most of the chickens had been eaten by the wolves. Daddy shouted loudly, drove away the wolves, and wanted to get the sheep back.

"Right away he chased them into the mountains, and I was extremely worried, not knowing if daddy could get the sheep back. After I waited for a long time, daddy returned, limping. He said that he slipped on the snow on the

mountain cliff and injured his leg. The spear fell below the cliff, so naturally he could not get the sheep back.

"I was so disappointed and sat down in the snow, crying loudly. Every day I tended the sheep well just because I wanted to wear flowery clothes. But in the end all my hopes and efforts came to nothing. I cried and shouted, 'Daddy, go get the sheep back, I want to wear new clothes, I want to wear new clothes!'"

Xiao Feng's heart sunk after hearing this. "This woman is inherently cold! Her daddy was injured, but she didn't care for her daddy's injury, and only thought of her flowery clothes. Besides, chasing after hungry wolves on a snowy night is dangerous. Although she was young at that time, it was still wrong of her."

He heard her continue, "My daddy said, 'Little girl, let's raise sheep again one of these days, and when we sell them next year, I will definitely buy you flowery clothes.' I only cried loudly and didn't comply. But what was the use of not complying? It was New Year's in less than half a month, and neighbor Sister Jiang wore a new coat with a yellow bottom and red flowers, and trousers with green chrysanthemums. When I saw them, I became sentimental, and was so angry that I refused to eat. Daddy constantly coaxed me, but I paid no attention to him."

Duan Zhengchun smiled and said, "If I had known at that time, I would have definitely given you ten, twenty sets of new clothes." He stretched and the candle flame flickered and shone on his face, full of helpless intoxication and lust.

Madame Ma said, "If I had ten, twenty sets, then I would not want them so badly. That night on New Year's Eve, I tossed and turned, unable to sleep, so I quietly got up and made my way to neighbor Uncle Jiang's home. The adults were staying up late on the New Year and hadn't gone to bed yet. The candle burned brightly, and I saw Sister Jiang asleep on her bed. Her new clothes and trousers were draped over her and seemed even more pretty under the red

candle flame. I stared blankly for a long time before I quietly entered the room and picked up her new set of clothes and trousers."

Duan Zhengchun said, "Stealing new clothes? Aiyo, I only knew that our Little Kang stole men, but it looks like she also stole clothes."

Madame Ma's starry eyes shone, and smiling sweetly, she said, "I didn't steal the new clothes and trousers! I picked up the scissors in the needlework basket on the table, and cut her new clothes into pieces, and her trousers into strips, never to be sewn back together. After I thoroughly cut the new clothes and trousers, my heart felt indescribably happy, even more overjoyed than if I had new clothes myself."

Duan Zhengchun's face had contained a smiling expression all along, but after hearing this, his face gradually changed color. Rather unhappily, he said, "Little Kang, don't talk about these old matters. Let's sleep!"

Madame Ma said, "No, it's rare that I have a few days together with you. After today, I'm afraid that the two of us will never meet again, so I want to talk to you more. Duan Lang, do you know why I told you this story? I want you to understand my temperament, which has been the same since childhood. If there is something that I think about day and night but cannot obtain it, yet someone else with good luck gets it, then no matter what I must destroy it. When I was a child I used stupid methods, but as I slowly grew up and became smarter, I used clever methods."

Duan Zhengchun shook his head and said, "Don't say anymore. If you let me hear these mood-spoiling words, I will no longer be interested, so don't blame me later."

Madame Ma smiled slightly and stood up, slowly untying the white hair tie. Her long hair hung down to her waist, soft as silk. She picked up a comb made from yellow poplar wood, suddenly turned around and smiled, her expression infinitely flirtatious, and said, "Duan Lang, hold me!" Her voice was extremely soft and intimate.

Although Xiao Feng loathed and detested this woman, when he saw her glance under the candlelight and heard her say “hold me,” his heart couldn’t help but palpitate with eagerness.

Duan Zhengchun laughed, leaned against the bed, and wanted to stand up and hold her. But he had drunk too much wine and actually couldn’t stand up. Smiling, he said, “I only drank six or seven cups of wine, yet I actually got this seriously intoxicated. Little Kang, you have the countenance of a flower and a face like the moon, causing one to be intoxicated from one glance. Truly equal to three catties of strong wine, hehe.”

When Xiao Feng heard this, he was surprised. “After only drinking six or seven cups of wine, how can he be drunk? Duan Zhengchun’s internal energy is powerful, so even if he has no liquor tolerance at all, it still doesn’t make sense. Something’s strange here.”

He heard Madame Ma laugh delicately and say intimately, “Duan Lang, come over, I have no strength, you...you should quickly come and hold me.”

Qin Hongmian and Ruan Xingzhu, who were lying outside the window, heard every word of Madame Ma’s coquettish flirting. Their envy was like a fire attacking their hearts and exploding through their chests, but they couldn’t raise their hands to cover their ears.

Duan Zhengchun leaned his left hand against the bed and tried to exert strength to stand up. But as soon as his body straightened, his knees weakened and he sat down again. He smiled and said, “I don’t have any strength either, how strange. When I see you, I’m like a mouse seeing a cat, and my entire body weakens.”

Madame Ma smiled gently and said, “I won’t let you get away with it. You only drank a little bit, yet you pretend to be intoxicated to deceive me. Transfer your breath and use your internal energy, shouldn’t that be enough?”

Duan Zhengchun transferred his inner breath and tried to take a real breath, but how could he have expected that his elixir field (dantian) was boundlessly empty, and he couldn't even fathom anything accurately. He took three breaths in succession, but oddly the profound internal energy that he had cultivated for over ten years had suddenly vanished, and he didn't know when it had left his body. He started to panic, knowing that the situation was far from good. But he was experienced in the risks of Jianghu, so his face remained calm and collected. Smiling, he said, "I only have the Yi Yang Finger and Six Meridians Divine Sword left. I'm so intoxicated that I can only kill people, not hold people."

Xiao Feng thought, "Although this person is greedy for beauty and lascivious, he isn't stupid. He already knows that he's trapped in a dangerous situation, but still says he can 'only kill people, not hold people.' Actually he knows the Yi Yang Finger but not the Six Meridians Divine Sword. Clearly he's being falsely intimidating. If he doesn't have internal energy, he also can't use his Yi Yang Finger."

Madame Ma said softly, "Aiyo, I'm feeling dizzy. Duan Lang, could it be...could it be that you put something in the wine?"

Duan Zhengchun originally suspected that she had drugged the wine, but when he heard her say this, his suspicion of her immediately disappeared. He beckoned with his hand and said, "Little Kang, come over, I have something to tell you."

Madame Ma seemed as if she was going to take a step to walk over, but she couldn't stand up and leaned against the table. Her face like peach blossoms, she panted heavily and said charmingly, "Duan Lang, I can't even take a single step. You were afraid that I wouldn't do it with you, so you put an aphrodisiac in the wine, didn't you? You're so indecent."

Duan Zhengchun shook his head, made a gesture with his hand, dipped a finger in the wine, and wrote on the table, "We've already fallen into the enemy's venomous



plan. Try hard to remain composed and calm.” He said, “Now my internal energy has returned. These few cups of poisoned wine can’t bewilder me.”

Madame Ma wrote on the table, “Is this true or false?”

Duan Zhengchun wrote, “Must not show weakness.” Loudly he said, “Little Kang, what enemy do you have who uses this venomous plan to harm me?”

From outside the window, Xiao Feng saw his words “Must not show weakness.” Knowing that the situation was far from good, he thought, “Although Duan Zhengchun is skilled and formidable, in the end he still falls into the hands of a woman. This poison was obviously put in by Madame Ma. When she heard you say ‘I can only kill people, not hold people,’ fearing that your martial arts were strong, she pretended to be poisoned herself. When she asked if what you said was true or false, how could you be fooled so easily?”

Madame Ma’s face showed worry, and she wrote on the table, “Is it true or false that your internal energy has completely vanished?” But she said, “If there is a villain who wants to ruin our plans, then that’s too bad. Feeling bored, he just happens to do this for amusement. You should just sit here and ignore it, and see if he has the guts to take action!”

Duan Zhengchun wrote, “I can only hope that the effect of the medicine wears off earlier and the enemy arrives later.” He said, “Right, whoever plays around with us will fail. Little Kang, do you want to see my lingkong pressure point hitting method?”

Madame Ma smiled and said, “I’ve never seen it before. Since your internal energy hasn’t vanished, then use your Yi Yang Finger to poke a hole in the paper window, all right?”

Duan Zhengchun knit his brows slightly and winked to convey a hint. He thought, “I have no internal energy, so how can I hit the lingkong pressure point? I’m intimidating the enemy, but how come you don’t understand?”

Yet Madame Ma repeatedly urged, "Hurry up, you only need to poke a small hole in the paper window to force the enemy to retreat. Otherwise everything will be ruined, so don't let the enemy see through our plan!"

Duan Zhengchun trembled and thought, "She has always been intelligent and clever, so why is she deliberately acting stupid now?"

Just as he was muttering to himself, Madame Ma said softly, "Duan Lang, you've been poisoned by the strong 'Ten Fragrance Bewitching Powder.' Even if your martial arts are as high as the sky, your internal energy will still completely vanish. If you can still hit the lingkong pressure point and use your internal energy breath to prick a small hole in the paper window, then that would be a miracle."

Duan Zhengchun was alarmed and said, "I've...I've been poisoned by the strong 'Ten Fragrance Bewitching Powder'? How...how do you know?"

Madame Ma laughed delicately and said, "When I was pouring wine for you, hehe, it seemed like I wasn't careful and a packet of poison fell into the wine cup. Ai, as soon as I saw you, my spirit and soul were upside-down and I was bewildered. Duan Lang, don't blame me."

Duan Zhengchun forced a smile and said, "Mm, so that's what happened, not a problem." At this moment his thoughts were already as clear as snow. He knew that he was already controlled by Madame Ma, so if he furiously scolded her, it would be of no avail. Thus, he could only pretend that there was no problem, and he did his utmost to remain calm. He tried to make sense of the perilous situation and thought, "She's always had deep passion for me and would definitely not harm my life. It's probably only that she wants me to promise to never return home and stay with her for a lifetime. Or she wants me to bring her back to Dali so that we can properly become husband and wife. It's a way of expressing her love for me; although her method is excessive, it definitely has no evil intent."

Sure enough Madame Ma asked, "Duan Lang, are you willing for us to become husband and wife?"

Duan Zhengchun smiled and said, "You're too formidable. Fine, I surrender. Tomorrow, we'll return to Dali together, and I'll take you as the South-Subduing King's side concubine."

When Qin Hongmian and Ruan Xingzhu heard this, once again their envy was like a fire attacking their hearts. Both of them thought, "What's so good about this sl\*t? You don't promise me, yet you promise her."

Madame Ma sighed and said, "Duan Lang, when I asked you a while earlier about how you would arrange for me in the future, you said that Dali was hot, humid, and full of malaria, and that if I went there, I would get sick. Now you're forced to promise me, but you're not really sincere."

Duan Zhengchun sighed and said, "Little Kang, let me tell you, I'm the younger brother of the Dali Emperor. My older brother has no sons, so after his thousand-year reign, he will give the title of Emperor to me. In Central Plains I am only a man with martial arts, but when I return to Dali, I cannot do as I please. Don't you agree?"

Madame Ma said, "Yes, but so what?"

Duan Zhengchun said, "There are difficulties in between in the first place, but you treated me thusly, and actually didn't hesitate to use poisoning methods. Naturally I would change my mind. It isn't as if I don't want to have a good person like you by my side every day. Since I promised to take you back to Dali, I definitely won't go back on my word."

Madame Ma softly let out an "oh" sound and said, "These words are reasonable. In the future when you become Emperor, can you make me Empress?"

Duan Zhengchun hesitated and said, "I already have a first wife, so Empress won't do..."

Madame Ma said, "Yes, I'm an inauspicious widow, so how could I become an Empress? Wouldn't that be a joke to the thousands upon thousands of Dali people?" She picked up

the comb again and slowly combed her hair. Smiling, she said, "Duan Lang, when I told you that story just now, did you understand my meaning?"

The cold sweat on Duan Zhengchun's forehead dripped down, and he strived to suppress his fearful state of mind. But the internal energy that he had diligently cultivated for over ten years had completely vanished to who knows where. Now he was like a drowning man, his hands desperately clawing for life, but unable to grab even a single straw.

Madame Ma asked, "Duan Lang, your body is very hot, isn't it? I'll wipe your sweat." She took out a silk handkerchief from her bosom, walked over to his side, and lightly wiped the cold sweat on his forehead. She said softly, "Duan Lang, you need to take care of your body. After drinking it's easy to catch a cold, so if you're unwell, wouldn't that make me more worried?"

When Duan Zhengchun inside and Xiao Feng outside the window heard this, both felt a fear that was difficult to describe. Duan Zhengchun forced a smile and said, "That night when you were dripping with fragrant sweat, I also wiped your sweat. I've kept that handkerchief with me for over ten years."

Madame Ma's expression was bashful and she said softly, "Aren't you afraid of being shameful, having the nerve to bring up old affairs from over ten years ago? Take it out for me to see."

It wasn't actually true that Duan Zhengchun had kept that old handkerchief with him for over ten years, but unexpectedly it was actually in his bosom at that moment. It was easy for him to make women happy, and this set of skills was an important reason that caused every woman who had a romantic ill-fated relationship with him to believe that the woman he truly loved was herself. Only because of all kinds of difficult to repel misfortunes in fate were they unable to forge a blissful marriage. He wanted to take out this

handkerchief from his bosom to make her care for their old affection, but who would have known that his fingers could only move slightly, and everything above his palm was completely numb. The toxicity of this 'Ten Fragrance Bewitching Powder' was so strong that he actually had no strength to take out the handkerchief.

Madame Ma said, "Take it out for me to see! Humph, you're deceiving me again."

Duan Zhengchun smiled bitterly and said, "Haha, I'm so intoxicated that I can't even move my hands, so take it out for me."

Madame Ma said, "As if I'll be fooled! You want to trick me into coming over so that you can use the Yi Yang Finger to kill me."

Duan Zhengchun smiled and said, "Such an unparalleled and exceptional beauty like you, even if I am a vicious convict who cannot be pardoned from ten evils, I would still be unwilling to mark your face with even half a fingernail scratch."

Madame Ma smiled and said, "Really? Duan Lang, I'm always slightly uneasy, so I must use a rope to bind your hands, and then...then I will use a thread of soft silk to firmly bind your heart."

Duan Zhengchun said, "You've bound my heart long ago. Otherwise, how could I obediently hand myself over?"

Madame Ma scoffed and said, "You were originally a good person, so it's no wonder that you caused me to get this lovesickness that can never be cured." While saying this, she pulled open a drawer beside the bed and took out a rope made from ox tendons.

Duan Zhengchun was even more scared and thought, "So she had actually prepared everything long ago, yet I was completely in the dark. Duan Zhengchun, ah Duan Zhengchun, today you will lose your life here, but who can you blame?"

Madame Ma said, "I'll bind your hands first. Duan Lang, I like you beyond words. Are you angry at me?"

Duan Zhengchun knew Madame Ma's temper well. Although she was a woman, she was even more firm and persistent than ordinary men. Malicious insults wouldn't make her angry, and strenuous and earnest lament wouldn't make her change her mind. At present there was no better option than delaying the time and looking for an opportunity to turn peril into safety and escape from the predicament. Thus he smiled and said, "As soon as I see your watery eyes, even anger as big as the sky will melt into nothing. Little Kang, come over and let me smell the jasmine flower in your hair."

Over ten years ago, because of these very words, Duan Zhengchun and Madame Ma began their ill-fated relationship. Now that their old affair was mentioned again, Madame Ma's body slanted and fell softly onto his bosom. Her amorous feelings were unlimited, and she was extremely delicate and bashful. She held out her hand to gently caress Duan Zhengchun's cheek and said intimately, "Duan Lang, Duan Lang, that night when I gave my body to you, I told you that if you were ever unfaithful, what would happen?"

Duan Zhengchun only felt that there were gold stars dancing in front of his eyes, and beads of sweat as large as soy beans oozed down his forehead drop by drop.

Madame Ma said, "Heartless man, my dear man, have you so easily forgotten the curse you gambled on?"

Duan Zhengchun smiled bitterly and said, "I said that I would let you bite off all the flesh on my body mouthful by mouthful." Originally this vow was purely a joke, just flirtatious talk between a man and a woman when together, but as Duan Zhengchun said this, the flesh on his entire body couldn't help but tremble.

Madame Ma smiled enchantingly and said, "After so many years, you actually haven't forgotten the words you said to me. My Duan Lang is really conscientious. Duan Lang, I want

to bind your hands and play a new game with you. Are you willing or not? If you're willing, I'll bind you; if you're unwilling, I won't bind you. All along I've always obeyed you in everything, only hoping to make you happy."

Duan Zhengchun knew that even if he said he wouldn't let her bind him, she would definitely find another grotesque method. Smiling bitterly, he said, "Since you want to bind me, then bind me. For me to die under a peony flower, even becoming a ghost will be romantic. Nothing can be happier than dying under your hands."

Xiao Feng, listening outside the window, couldn't help but admire his astonishing ability to make teasing remarks in such a critical situation. He saw Madame Ma pulling his hands behind his back, using the ox tendon rope to bind them firmly, and tying seven or eight tight knots in succession. Even if Duan Zhengchun's internal energy wasn't damaged, he wouldn't be capable of struggling free in a short time, not to mention that now his martial arts had completely vanished.

Madame Ma smiled delicately and said, "I hate your legs the most. With one step you left without a trace." Saying this, she lightly twisted his thigh.

Duan Zhengchun smiled and said, "That year when we met, it was these legs that brought me over. Although these legs have greatly sinned, their contribution isn't small either."

Madame Ma said, "Fine! I'll bind them too." Saying this, she picked up another ox tendon rope and bound his feet.

She took a pair of scissors and slowly cut open the layers of clothing on his right shoulder, revealing snow white skin. Although Duan Zhengchun was no longer young, he took excellent care of himself. He had lived in wealth and splendor his entire life and had profound internal energy, so the skin on his shoulder was still smooth and sturdy.

Madame Ma held out her hand to gently caress his shoulder, puckered her cherry-like lips, and kissed his cheek,

gradually kissing from his neck to his shoulder. She groaned intimately with “oh oh oh” sounds, a gentle and sweet love beyond words.

Amidst this, Duan Zhengchun loudly shouted out “ah,” his voice piercing the quiet night. Madame Ma raised her head, her mouth filled with blood, having already bitten off a chunk of flesh from his shoulder.

Madame Ma spit out the small chunk of flesh onto the ground, smiled charmingly, and said, “Hitting is passion, scolding is love. I love you to death, so I bit you. Duan Lang, you said so yourself that if you cease to be faithful, you would let me bite off the flesh on your body mouthful by mouthful.”

Duan Zhengchun laughed and said, “Yes, Little Kang, how can the words that I said before not count? Sometimes I wonder, what would be the best way for me to die in the future? Dying in bed from illness seems too mediocre. Dying in the battlefield defending the country is of course great, but although valiant, it’s not romantic. It’s like everything is fine except for one small defect, and not how Duan Zhengchun usually behaves. Little Kang, the method you thought of today is formidable and has fulfilled my dream of Duan Zhengchun losing his life to the little cherry-like mouth and pearl-like teeth of the most beautiful woman of this era. Think, if Duan Zhengchun and you didn’t have a romance in which our feelings were carved into our bones, then if it was a second man, even if he gave you enough jewels to fill a bed, you definitely wouldn’t be willing to take a single bite of his body. Little Kang, do you agree?”

Qin Hongmian and Ruan Xingzhu had long since been scared out of their wits. They knew that Duan Zhengchun’s life was coming to an end at any time, but seeing that Xiao Feng was still crouching under the window and watching what was happening but not helping, they scolded him a thousand times in their hearts.



But Xiao Feng was still trying to fathom Madame Ma's real intentions, not knowing if she seriously wanted to kill Duan Zhengchun, or if she was only trying to scare him a little, make him suffer some romantic sins, and then forgive him so that hereafter he would always loyally stay with her. If she was doing this all as an awkward joke between lovers, and he rudely and impetuously charged into the room to rescue him, then he would lose a golden opportunity to find out the truth. Thus he still held his breath and observed calmly.

Madame Ma smiled and said, "Yes, even if it's the son of heaven of Great Song or the emperor of the Khitans, it would be easy for him to kill me, but he can forget about ordering me to take a bite of him. Duan Lang, originally I wanted to slowly bite you to death, bite you thousands of times, but I'm afraid that your subordinates will rush over to rescue you. How about this, I'll pierce this knife into your chest, only by half an inch, so it won't take your life. If someone comes to rescue you, I'll hit the knife handle, and you won't need to suffer being torn into scraps." Saying this, she took out a dazzling dagger, cut open the clothing on Duan Zhengchun's chest, and aimed the dagger point at his heart. She let go lightly and inserted the dagger into his chest, surely enough only piercing a little.

This time, Duan Zhengchun made no sound. Blood immediately flowed out of his chest. He said, "Little Kang, your ten fingers are even whiter and softer than when you were seventeen."

When Madame Ma pierced the dagger into Duan Zhengchun's body, Xiao Feng observed her hands without blinking. If he saw her exert too much force and endanger Duan Zhengchun's life, he would immediately charge in with a palm and cause her body to quake. But he saw that she only pierced lightly, so he still did nothing.

Madame Ma said, "When I was seventeen, I had to cook and do laundry, so naturally my hands were rougher. Over the last few years I didn't need to do any hard labor, so my

skin really became more fragile. Duan Lang, where should I bite you next? I'll bite you wherever you tell me to; I always obey you."

Duan Zhengchun smiled and said, "Little Kang, even after you bite me to death, I won't leave your side."

Madame Ma asked, "What are you up to?"

Duan Zhengchun said, "When a wife conspires to murder her husband, her dead husband's spirit will never scatter and will always linger by her side to prevent a second man from getting close to her."

Duan Zhengchun originally only wanted to scare her a little with these words to warn her not to be too malicious. Surprisingly, after Madame Ma heard this, her complexion changed greatly, and she couldn't help but take a look behind her. Duan Zhengchun seized the chance to say, "Yi! Who's that person behind you?"

Madame Ma was scared and asked, "Who's behind me? Nonsense."

Duan Zhengchun said, "Mm, it's a man smiling at you. He's holding onto his throat as if it hurts a lot. Who's that, wearing ragged clothes, continuously shedding tears..."

Madame Ma quickly turned around, saw no one, and said in a trembling voice, "You're deceiving me...you're deceiving me!"

Duan Zhengchun originally spoke thoughtlessly, but when he saw her abnormally alarmed, he immediately became suspicious. He began having second thoughts and faintly felt that perhaps there was something fishy about Ma Dayuan's death. He knew that Ma Dayuan had died under the 'Throat-Lock Capturing Technique,' so he deliberately said that the person seemed as if his throat hurt a lot, was shedding tears, and wore ragged clothing. Sure enough, Madame Ma was greatly alarmed. Duan Zhengchun guessed another thirty percent and said, "Ah, how strange, how come this man disappeared in the blink of an eye? Who is he?"

Madame Ma's complexion was already extremely frightened, but at this moment she was still as calm as usual and said, "Duan Lang, now that you have reached this stage today, what's the point in scaring me? You know that not cursing won't do. The two of us were once together; now let me give you a straightforward breakup." Saying this, she took a step forward and held out her hand to push the dagger handle.

Duan Zhengchun, knowing that he could no longer stall for time, stared behind her and shouted loudly, "Ma Dayuan, Ma Dayuan, hurry and kill your wife!"

Madame Ma, upon seeing that his face showed an abnormally terrified expression, and furthermore upon hearing him shout 'Ma Dayuan,' couldn't help but tremble all over and turned around to take a look. Duan Zhengchun exerted all of his effort to stick out his head and strike her chin. Madame Ma immediately fell down and fainted.

Duan Zhengchun didn't actually use his internal energy in this strike. Although Madame Ma fainted for a moment, she woke up after a short while and leisurely stood up. Stroking her lower jaw, she smiled and said, "Duan Lang, you love so barbarically and struck me so painfully here. You fabricated these words to scare me, but I won't be fooled by you."

With this strike, Duan Zhengchun had already exhausted all the strength that he had gathered for a long time. Inwardly he sighed and thought, "My fate is thus; what can a man say!" Having second thoughts, he said, "Little Kang, you'll kill me just like this? Then when members of the Beggar Clan accuse you of murdering your husband, who will come to help you?"

Madame Ma laughed and said, "Who said I killed my husband? It's not like you're my husband. If you were really my husband, there wouldn't be enough time to pity and love you, so how would I be willing to harm you? After I kill you, I'll escape far away and won't stay here. How would I be able

to deal with your Dali subjects when they come searching for you?" She sighed serenely and said, "Duan Lang, I truly miss you and love you, and only hope to hold you in my bosom, kiss you, and dote on you. But only because I cannot have you, I must destroy you. This is my natural temperament and can't be helped."

Duan Zhengchun said, "Mm, yes, that day you deliberately deceived that young lady and wanted to use Qiao Feng to kill me."

Madame Ma said, "Yes, Qiao Feng that manservant is so useless. He couldn't even kill you and let you escape."

Xiao Feng thought, "The skill of A'Zhu's disguise as Bai Shijing was so divine that even I couldn't tell the difference. Madame Ma and Bai Shijing aren't familiar with each other, so how did she see through the scheme?"

Madame Ma said, "Duan Lang, I want to take another bite of you."

Duan Zhengchun smiled and said, "Come bite me then. There's nothing I like better." Xiao Feng, seeing that he couldn't delay any longer, extended his fist, pressed it above the clay wall behind Duan Zhengchun, and secretly applied force. The clay wall wasn't very firm in the first place, so he inserted his fist slowly and finally pierced a hole soundlessly, his palm pressing against Duan Zhengchun's back.

At this moment, Madame Ma bit off another chunk of flesh from Duan Zhengchun's shoulder. Duan Zhengchun shouted out loudly, his body trembling. Suddenly he felt that his hands were free. The ox tendon rope that bound his wrists had already been torn off by Xiao Feng's fingers. At the same time, extremely profound internal energy rushed into all of his channels.

Duan Zhengchun was startled, knowing that strong assistance had arrived from outside. His breath could move at will, and the internal energy was transferred from his back to his arm, then to his finger. With a "chi" sound, the

remarkable Yi Yang Finger was activated. Madame Ma was hit under the ribs by his finger, and shrieking “aiyo,” she fell on the bed.

Xiao Feng, seeing that Duan Zhengchun had already gotten Madame Ma under control, withdrew his hand immediately.

Duan Zhengchun wanted to express thanks, but suddenly the doorway curtain was lifted and a person walked in. That person said, “Little Kang, your old affection for him hasn’t ceased, right? How could you not cleanly do him in after destroying his great martial arts?”

When Xiao Feng saw that person through the window, he was dazed, alarmed, and angry. In this short period of time, many suspicions existed in his mind, and now all of them were unraveled. That day when Madame Ma was in the apricot forest in Wuxi, she had taken out the folding fan that he often used, and falsely accused him of going into the Ma home to steal a letter and losing it there. Where did she obtain this folding fan? If it had been stolen by someone, it was bound to be someone extremely close to him. In that case, who was it?

This great secret that he was a Khitan had been concealed for so many years. How could it have been so suddenly revealed? A’Zhu’s disguise as Bai Shijing was originally flawless, so how could Madame Ma have seen through it?

So the person who had walked in was actually the Beggar Clan’s Law Enforcement Elder, Bai Shijing.

Frightened, Madame Ma said, “He...he hasn’t lost his martial arts, and he sealed...sealed my acupuncture point.”

Bai Shijing leaped forward and grabbed Duan Zhengchun’s hands. With two “kala” sounds, he twisted and broke his wrists. Duan Zhengchun had absolutely no strength to resist. The internal energy breath that Xiao Feng had transferred to him only lasted for a short while; as soon

as Xiao Feng withdrew his hand, he became a crippled person again.

After seeing Bai Shijing, Xiao Feng's thoughts bubbled forth like a tide in an instant. He didn't expect that he would have to help Duan Zhengchun again, and also didn't expect that Bai Shijing would immediately use evil methods. When he awoke from his daze, Duan Zhengchun's wrists had already been broken. He thought, "This person is loose and lascivious, so letting him suffer a little more today is a good thing. On account of A'Zhu, I will always save his life in the end."

Bai Shijing said, "Surnamed Duan, look at how you don't use your good skills. After consuming the Ten Fragrance Bewitching Powder, you still have thirty percent of your martial arts left."

Although Duan Zhengchun didn't know who had extended his palm to help him from outside the wall, but it was bound to be a highly skilled person. It was true that at present he had another strong enemy, but great assistance was behind him, so he didn't panic. Judging from Bai Shijing's tone, it was obvious that he didn't know that he had a helper. Thus he asked, "Honored sir, are you an elder of the Beggar Clan? You and I are total strangers, so why would you immediately use evil methods?"

Bai Shijing walked over to Madame Ma's side and massaged her waist a few times. The Duan family's Yi Yang Finger's pressure point martial arts was exceedingly marvelous, so although Bai Shijing's martial arts wasn't weak, he was unable to unseal her acupuncture point. Frowning, he asked, "How are you feeling?" His tone was deeply concerned.

Madame Ma said, "My hands and feet are limp and painful, so I can't take a single step. Shijing, do him in, and then let's leave quickly. I don't want to stay in this room...this room any longer."

Duan Zhengchun suddenly laughed loudly and said, "Little Kang, how could it be that you...you haven't improved at all? Haha, haha!"

Madame Ma smiled and said, "Duan Lang, you have such a good personality that even when death is imminent, you can still laugh so happily and freely."

Bai Shijing said angrily, "You still call him 'Duan Lang'? You sl\*t." With a slap of his hand, he heavily struck her by her ear. Madame Ma's snow white right cheek immediately became red and swollen, and it was so painful that her tears flowed.

Duan Zhengchun shouted angrily, "Stop, why are you hitting her?"

Bai Shijing laughed coldly and said, "On what basis do you have the right to care? She's mine. If I want to hit her I'll hit her, if I want to scold her I'll scold her."

Duan Zhengchun said, "Such a flower-like and jade-like beauty, how can you bear to hit her? Even if she's yours, you should gain her favor in a low voice and coax her to be happy."

Madame Ma glared at Bai Shijing and said, "Listen! Listen to how he treats me, but how do you treat me? You're not even ashamed."

Bai Shijing scolded, "Little wh\*re, see if I don't roast you. Surnamed Duan, I'm certainly not going to listen to you. You know how to gain women's favor, but how come she wants to harm you? Please, next year on this day is your anniversary of death." Saying this, he took one step forward and held out his hand to push in the dagger in his chest.

Xiao Feng's right palm extended into the hole in the clay wall again. If Bai Shijing walked another half step closer, he would immediately send out his palm.

At this moment, a gust of strong wind blew open the doorway curtain. With a "hu" sound, the strong wind blew everywhere and extinguished the flames of the two candles

at the same time. The room was immediately plunged into darkness.

Madame Ma cried out “ah” in fear. Bai Shijing knew that an enemy had arrived, and at this moment he had no time to kill Duan Zhengchun. It was more urgent to face the enemy, so he shouted loudly, “Who’s there?” He protected his chest with both palms and turned his body around. The gust of strong wind that extinguished the candle flames had obviously been sent out by a person of extremely high martial arts. But after the candle flames were extinguished, there was even less movement. Bai Shijing, Duan Zhengchun, Madame Ma, and Xiao Feng stared and faintly saw that the room already contained another person.

Madame Ma was the first to lose her calm and shouted sharply, “Someone’s here, someone’s here!” This person blocked the door, hands drooping down, facial features unclear, and stood motionless.

Bai Shijing asked loudly, “Who is it?” He took one step forward. That person was silent and motionless. Bai Shijing shouted loudly, “If you don’t respond, then I won’t be polite.” He knew from the newcomer’s palm strength in extinguishing the candle flames that his martial arts were extremely powerful, so he didn’t dare to hastily make a move. That person still remained motionless, and in the darkness seemed like an eerie ghost.

Upon seeing the newcomer’s appearance, Duan Zhengchun and Xiao Feng had the same suspicions in their minds. “This person’s martial arts are formidable. Who could it be?”

Madame Ma shouted sharply, “Go light the candle flames! I’m scared, I’m scared!”

Bai Shijing shouted loudly, “Wh\*re, stop talking nonsense!” If he acted as she said and turned around to light the candle flames, he would be immediately betraying his crucial back to the enemy. He protected his chest with both palms with the intention of waiting for his opponent to



make a move first. Strangely, that person was motionless all along. The two of them were in opposition in this way for practically two hours. Of course Xiao Feng wouldn't make any sounds, and Duan Zhengchun said nothing. It was silent all around; even the sound of falling snowflakes could practically be heard.

Finally Bai Shijing was unable to keep his calm and shouted, "Since you won't respond, I'll have to commit an offense." At this moment, seeing that his opponent still made no moves, he immediately flipped over his hands and took out a cleaved armor steel awl from his bosom and leaped up. Light flashed in the darkness and the steel awl was swiftly thrust at that person's chest.

With a flash, that person tilted his body and dodged out of the way. Bai Shijing felt a gust of strong wind pressing directly towards him, and his opponent's fingers had already grabbed his own throat. This move was extremely fast; he hadn't yet withdrawn his own steel awl when his opponent's fingers had already sharply caught his throat. This time, he was seriously so scared that his spirit was no longer attached to his body, and he hastily leaped back. In a trembling voice he said, "You...you..."

What he was truly afraid of was not that his opponent's martial arts were powerful, but rather that just now, that person had actually used the 'Throat-Lock Capturing Technique.' This set of martial arts was the supreme skill of Ma Dayuan's family. Apart from members of the Ma family, no one was able to use it. Bai Shijing and Ma Dayuan were friends for a long time, so naturally he understood his family's martial arts. His back dripped with cold sweat and he stared at that person, only seeing that his figure was extremely tall, the same as Ma Dayuan, but his appearance was unclear in the darkness. That person was still silent and motionless, gloomy and ghostly from head to toe. Bai Shijing felt a faint pain in his neck, and believed that it had been pricked by his fingernail. He composed himself and asked,

“Honored sir, is your surname Ma?” That person seemed deaf and ignored him.

Bai Shijing said, “Little wh\*re, light the candles.”

Madame Ma said, “I can’t move. You should light them.”

But how could Bai Shijing dare to move casually and give him a loophole? He thought, “This person’s martial arts are obviously better than mine. If he wants to rescue Duan Zhengchun, he doesn’t need to wait for others to come and help him. Why doesn’t he pursue and attack after one move?”

It was silent again for a long time. Suddenly, Bai Shijing detected a strange occurrence. Although everyone was silent and motionless in the room, there was still the sound of breathing. There was the sound of Madame Ma’s breathing, Duan Zhengchun’s breathing, and his own breathing, but the person standing opposite him made no breathing sounds.

Bai Shijing held his breath and listened carefully. With his cultivated internal energy, he should have been able to hear the sound of breathing of any person in the room, but the person opposite him didn’t breathe. After a very long time, that person still didn’t breathe. If he was a living person, how could he not breathe?

Bai Shijing heard the sound of his own heartbeat: pu, pu, pu, pu...he heard the sound of his heartbeat becoming louder and louder and felt his chest violently trembling. His heart seemed as if it was going to jump out of its cavity. Unable to exercise restraint any longer, he charged at that person with a loud shout. His cleaved armor awl slashed repeatedly, thrusting towards that person.

With a brush of that person’s left hand, he obstructed Bai Shijing’s right arm. His right hand stretched forward to grab at his throat. Bai Shijing was already guarded against his use of the ‘Throat-Lock Capturing Technique’ again, so he lowered his head and dodged under his armpit. But that person didn’t pursue and attack, and instead only blankly

stood at the doorway. Bai Shijing raised the awl to stab at his leg, and that person leaped straight up to avoid it. Madame Ma, upon seeing that this person's figure was stiff and that he didn't bend his knees when leaping up, couldn't help but blurt out, "Zombie, zombie!"

With a "teng" sound, that person fell down heavily. Bai Shijing felt even more scared and thought, "If this person is a martial arts expert, then how can he be so clumsy in his rising and falling movements? Could it be that there are really zombies in this world?"

Bai Shijing hesitated slightly, raised his monkey-like body, and with three "chi" sounds, the cleaved armor awl was thrust at that person's lower body three times. Indeed that person's knees were unable to bend. He only dodged stiffly jump by jump, apparently unable to even take steps. When Bai Shijing thrust to the left, he dodged by leaping to the right; when he thrust to the right, he just dodged to the left. Bai Shijing discovered his opponent's weakness, and the fear in his heart disappeared. But he felt more and more that he wasn't a living person, and he thrust the awl several times again. Although his opponent's movements were clumsy, the exquisite variations of his awl technique were all along unable to harm him.

Suddenly, his neck felt cold, and a large ice-cold hand touched him. Bai Shijing was extremely shocked and violently brandished the awl to thrust behind him. With a light "chi" sound, he thrust into the empty air, but that person's large hand had already grabbed the back of his neck. Bai Shijing's entire body was limp and painful, he was no longer able to take a single step, and he could only repeatedly pant for breath with "hu hu hu" sounds.

Madame Ma shouted loudly, "Shijing, Shijing, what's wrong?"

How could Bai Shijing still have spare energy to respond? He only felt that his body's internal energy was in the

process of being squeezed out bit by bit by the large hand on the back of his neck.

Suddenly, a large hand as ice-cold as iron touched his face. This hand was seriously not a human hand and completely lacked any warmth. Bai Shijing also couldn't help but shout out, "Zombie! Zombie!" His voice was shrill and terrified. Starting from his forehead, that large hand slowly moved down and touched his eyes, the fingers sliding back and forth over his eyeballs. Bai Shijing was so scared that he nearly fainted. With only a slight exertion of force, his opponent's fingers could immediately dig out his eyeballs. But this cold hand moved down again, touching his nose and then touching his mouth. Inch by inch it moved down and finally caught his throat. Two ice-cold fingers clasped his Adam's apple, gradually tightening.

Bai Shijing was infinitely surprised and shouted, "Brother Dayuan, spare me! Spare me!"

Madame Ma shouted sharply, "What...what did you say?"

Bai Shijing shouted, "Brother Dayuan, it was all this cheap wh\*re's idea, it was she who forced me to do it, it has...it has nothing to do with me!"

Madame Ma said angrily, "So what if it was my idea? Ma Dayuan, you were a useless weakling in life, and now what can you do in death? I'm not afraid of you."

Bai Shijing felt that when he had spoken up and blamed someone else, the fingers on his throat had loosened slightly. When he stopped talking, the ice-cold fingers slowly tightened again. His heart was frenzied, and when he heard Madame Ma calling him 'Ma Dayuan,' he was even more convinced that this monster was precisely Ma Dayuan's zombie. He shouted, "Brother Dayuan, spare me! Your wife stealthily read Chief Wang's will and urged you again and again to expose the secret of Qiao Feng's birth, but you were certainly unwilling...so she...she conceived a scheme to harm you..."

Xiao Feng's heart trembled; he obviously didn't believe in ghosts, and was certain that it was a famous martial arts expert deliberately pretending to be a ghost to make Bai Shijing and Madame Ma frenzied. That way he could seize the chance to demand a confession from the two of them. Sure enough, Bai Shijing was both mentally and physically exhausted, and let it out. Judging from what he said, Ma Dayuan was killed by the two of them, with Madame Ma being the chief schemer. The reason for Madame Ma wanting to kill her husband lay in her wanting to expose the secret of his own birth, but Ma Dayuan hadn't allowed it. "Why does she hate me so much? Why must she overthrow me? If she wanted to make her husband the chief, then she shouldn't have harmed her husband."

Madame Ma shouted sharply, "Ma Dayuan, you should just strangle me to death. I hate seeing your worthless appearance! You're a coward who can't undertake any great matters!"

With a light "kala" sound, a piece of Bai Shijing's throat cartilage was broken. Bai Shijing struggled desperately, but was completely unable to escape from that person's palm. After another "kala" sound, his throat shattered. He loudly inhaled a few breaths, but the breaths could never be absorbed into his body again. His limbs convulsed, and his breathing promptly stopped.

After strangling Bai Shijing to death, that person turned around and went out the door, disappearing without a trace.

Xiao Feng thought, "Who is this person? I need to chase after him and investigate clearly." At once he floated over to the front door. Under the reflection of the white snow, a faint human shadow could be seen gradually going in a northeast direction. Had his eyesight not been exceptionally good, he really wouldn't have been able to see it.

Xiao Feng thought, "This person's movements are so fast!" He bent over and tapped the shoulder of A'Zi, who lay beside his feet. His internal energy was sent out and he

unsealed her acupuncture point. He thought, "Madame Ma doesn't know martial arts. This little girl is enough to rescue her father." He didn't have time to unseal the acupuncture points of Ruan Xingzhu and the others. Taking large strides, he rapidly pursued the person ahead of him.

After a while of swift running, the distance between them was no more than a hundred feet. At this moment he saw clearly that sure enough, that person was a martial arts expert. At this moment he wasn't jumping with straightened legs, and his footsteps were relaxed, as if he were gliding on the snow. Xiao Feng's qinggong originated from Shaolin, and he had also been educated by Chief Wang of the Beggar Clan, a purely masculine sect. He took one large stride, covering ten feet, and his body leaped into the air. He took another stride, and although his movements weren't very elegant or graceful, they were extremely suitable for hastening on a long journey. After more pursuing, he became closer to that person by ten feet.

After running for approximately the time it took for half an incense stick to burn, the footsteps of the person ahead suddenly accelerated. Like a sailboat that had absorbed a lot of wind, he galloped fiercely with the flow, and in just a moment, the distance between him and Xiao Feng lengthened again. Xiao Feng was secretly apprehensive and thought, "This person is seriously formidable, and is truly one of the top experts in Wulin. Had he not been this kind of person, he wouldn't have been able to kill Bai Shijing when he raised his hand."

He was naturally different from others, and was truly a genius in martial arts. The martial arts of the masters he had learned from, Great Master Xuan Ku and Chief Wang, were already extremely high. But Xiao Feng was like blue emerging from green, and far surpassed his two masters. Any ordinary move in his hands would naturally send out unparalleled tremendous power. Everyone who knew him well said that this kind of martial arts gift was inherent, and

couldn't be obtained by being taught or by painstaking practice. Xiao Feng himself couldn't explain why, and was only aware that once he learned any move, he could use it, and once he could use it, he could master it. When facing the enemy, he naturally had many ingenious variations. But apart from martial arts, he was nothing more than average and no different than ordinary people whether in studying books or in craftsmanship. In his entire life he rarely encountered a worthy match. Many powerful enemies had more profound internal energy and more ingenious moves than he did, but once they fought, they would always lose at the most crucial moment by one and a half stances, and moreover be sincerely convinced in their loss and ready to concede. Knowing that in the end they could never match him, no one had ever sought him for revenge to expunge their humiliation.

Now that he had encountered an opponent with such superior qinggong, his heroic ambition couldn't help but suddenly arise. He accelerated his footsteps and caught up again. The two of them galloped northeast, one ahead and one behind, Xiao Feng all along unable to overtake him, and that person also unable to throw him off. After two hours, after four hours, the two of them had already run a hundred or more li, and were still neither too near nor too distant.

After another hour, the sky gradually brightened, and the heavy snow had already ceased. Xiao Feng saw a small town below a distant hillside, the houses lined up closely like the scales on a fish, and heard the sound of chickens heralding the break of day. His wine addiction suddenly arose and he shouted, "Brother ahead of me, I invite you to drink twenty bowls of wine. Then let's continue to compete in foot strength, all right?" That person didn't respond, and still ran rapidly with energy. Xiao Feng smiled and said, "You put to death Bai Shijing, that wicked traitor. You're truly a formidable hero. Xiao Feng concedes defeat; my qinggong is inferior to yours. Let's buy wine to drink and not compete,

not compete.” He spoke as he ran, his feet not slowing in the slightest.

That person suddenly halted and said, “Qiao Feng’s power shakes Jianghu. Sure enough your reputation is well-deserved. While you spoke, you still transferred your real breath naturally. Truly heroic, truly gallant!”

Xiao Feng heard his indistinct voice, which was conspicuously old, so his age should be much greater than his own. He said, “Senior overpraises me. Junior claims connections of higher status and wishes to be friends with senior. I wonder if you’ll dislike it?”

That person sighed and said, “I’m getting old and useless! Don’t chase after me. If we run for another two hours, I’ll lose to you!” As he said this, he walked slowly onward.

Xiao Feng wanted to chase after him and talk to him more, but he had only taken one stride when he thought, “He asked me to not chase after him.” He then recalled that the heroes in Central Plains despised him, and was afraid that this person also disdained and hated Khitans. At once he stopped and saw that person’s rear view gradually getting distant. After he entered a forest, he sighed and thought, “This person’s qinggong is wonderful and his internal energy is long-lasting. What a pity that I couldn’t meet him!” He then thought, “His voice was indistinct, and he had obviously deliberately lowered his voice so that I couldn’t recognize it. He didn’t even want me to hear his voice clearly, let alone meet him.”

After thinking for a long time, he finally entered the small town, went to a small wine shop, bought wine, and drank. Every time he drank one or two bowls, he clapped the table and boasted, “Good man, good fellow, ai, what a pity, what a pity!”

He said “good man, good fellow” to praise that person’s formidable martial arts, and also because he had handled killing Bai Shijing extremely appropriately. He then stated



that it was a pity because he was sighing that he had been unable to become friends with him. He usually loved friends as much as his life. This time, after being expelled from the Beggar Clan and furthermore developing deep enmity with the heroes of Central Plains, and having cleanly broken off from his former friends, he was extremely depressed. Today, having unexpectedly encountered a hero whose martial arts were at a level similar to his own, yet having no chance to get to know him, he could only wash away his worries with wine. But the many suspicions that had accumulated in his heart for a long time were already solved, so he also felt greatly happy.

After drinking more than twenty bowls of wine and paying the wine money, he rose and left, thinking, "I wonder how Duan Zhengchun is doing? Ruan Xingzhu and Qin Hongmian's acupuncture points have been sealed by me, so I must return and help them." Thus he took large strides and returned to the Ma home.

On the way back he never used his full strength, so his journey by foot was far slower. By the time he returned to the Ma home, it was already past noon. He didn't see a single person on the snowy ground outside the house. Ruan Xingzhu and the others weren't there; he presumed that A'Zi had already carried them into the house. He pushed open the door and entered the room, seeing Bai Shijing's corpse still fallen beside the door. Duan Zhengchun wasn't there. A woman was leaning on the side of the bed, her entire body covered with blood. She was precisely Madame Ma.

She heard the sound of footsteps, turned around, and said in a low voice, "Be charitable, quick, quickly kill me!"

Xiao Feng saw that her face was gray and defeated. In only one night, it seemed as if she had gotten older by twenty or thirty years, and she had become extremely ugly. He asked, "Where is Duan Zhengchun?"

Madame Ma said, "He was saved by this...this evil person! Ah!" Suddenly, she let out a great shout, her voice sharp

and extremely earsplitting.

Xiao Feng was caught off guard and given a scare by her. He retreated a step and asked, "What are you doing?"

Madame Ma gasped for breath and asked, "You're...you're Chief...Qiao?"

Xiao Feng laughed bitterly and said, "I've long since ceased to be chief of the Beggar Clan. Don't tell me that you didn't know?"

Madame Ma said, "Yes, you're Chief Qiao. Chief Qiao, please be charitable and quickly kill me."

Xiao Feng frowned and said, "I don't want to kill you. You killed your husband, so naturally there will be members of the Beggar Clan who will do you in."

Madame Ma pleaded, "I...I really can't bear it any longer. That little sl\*t's methods are so venomous. I...I won't let her off even when I become a ghost. You...you take a look...at my body."

She was leaning in the dark, so Xiao Feng couldn't see clearly. Having heard what she said, he went over and pushed open the window. Bright light entered the room, and after one glance, he couldn't help but slightly tremble. He saw Madame Ma's shoulders, arms, chest, thighs, everywhere cut by someone's knife into strips of wounds. There were actually densely packed ants crawling on the wounds. Upon seeing her wounds, Xiao Feng knew that the tendons of her four limbs and waist joints had been broken by someone, and she would never be able to move a single step. Acupuncture points could be unsealed and movement restored, but since her tendons and veins were broken, then they could never be healed, and from now on she would be a paralyzed cripple. But how could there actually be so many ants on her wounds?

Madame Ma said in a trembling voice, "That little sl\*t broke the tendons of my hands and feet, and cut wounds on me from head to toe, then...then she poured sweetened honey water on the wounds...she said that the sweetened

honey water would attract ants that would bite my entire body, making me ache, numb, and itch for several days and nights and causing me to suffer all kinds of miseries. She said that she would make me unable to beg for either life or death.”

Xiao Feng felt that he couldn't take another look at her wounds without doing something. He definitely wasn't a person with a soft heart, but he killed and burned, always fond of being frank and straightforward. He never used malicious methods to torment enemies. He sighed, turned around, and went into the kitchen. He came out carrying a large barrel of water and splashed it on her body, exempting her from the suffering of her body being gnawed by a pack of ants.

Madame Ma said, “Thank you. You have a good conscience. I won't be able to live. Be charitable and kill me with one strike of the blade.”

Xiao Feng asked, “Who...who slashed you?”

Madame Ma gnashed her teeth and said, “It was that little sl\*t. She's so young, not past fifteen or sixteen years of age, but her heart and methods are so venomous...”

Xiao Feng was alarmed and asked, “It was A'Zi?”

Madame Ma said, “Correct, I heard that sl\*tty woman call her that. She told her to quickly kill me. But this A'Zi, this little sl\*t, insisted on slowly and deliberately punishing me. She said that she wanted to avenge her father and give vent to her mother's anger, and wanted me to suffer such endless misery...”

Xiao Feng thought, “I was afraid that Qin Hongmian and Ruan Xingzhu would drink vinegar (be jealous) and kill Madame Ma. Without her alive, I wouldn't be able to interrogate her. Who would've thought that A'Zi, this little girl, is so cruel and malicious.” He frowned and said, “Duan Zhengchun had a love affair with you in past days, but when he saw his daughter tormenting you so cruelly, don't tell me that he actually didn't put a stop to it?”

Madame Ma said, "At that time he was already unconscious and unaware of all human affairs. That was...that was caused by the Ten Fragrance Bewitching Powder."

Xiao Feng nodded and said, "That's right. Considering that he's a hero who can distinguish right from wrong, how could he condone his daughter committing outrages? Hmm, what about those women?"

Madame Ma groaned and said, "Don't ask, don't ask, quickly kill me."

Xiao Feng snorted and said, "If you don't respond, then I'll pour some more sweetened honey water on your wounds and leave, letting you perish on your own."

Madame Ma said, "You men...are all so heartless and malicious..."

Xiao Feng asked, "So your method of murdering Brother Ma wasn't malicious?"

Madame Ma was surprised and asked, "How...how do you know everything? Who told you?"

Xiao Feng said coldly, "It's me asking you, not you asking me. It's you pleading with me, not me pleading with you. Hurry up and speak!"

Madame Ma said, "Fine, I'll tell you everything. A'Zi that little sl\*t punished me and her mother repeatedly shouted for her to stop, but A'Zi only laughed happily and didn't listen. Her mother's acupuncture point had already been sealed by someone, so she was unable to take a single step. Not much later, five or six of Duan Zhengchun's subordinates arrived. A'Zi that little sl\*t carried her mother, father, Qin Hongmian, and Qin Hongmian's daughter out of the room one by one, but didn't allow anyone to enter the room so as to prevent them from seeing me. Duan Zhengchun's subordinates rode on horseback, so they picked them up and left."

Xiao Feng nodded and thought, "Since Duan Zhengchun was picked up by his subordinates and Ruan Xingzhu and

the other two's sealed acupuncture points will naturally unseal after several hours, I don't need to pay attention to them."

Madame Ma said, "I've told you everything, you...you should quickly kill me."

Xiao Feng said, "It's not likely that you told everything, right? Isn't dying easy? Living is what's difficult. Why did you murder Brother Ma?"

Madame Ma's eyes glinted viciously and she asked hatefully, "Do you have to ask no matter what?"

Xiao Feng said, "Correct, I have to ask no matter what. I'm a hard-hearted man and won't take pity on you."

Madame Ma spat and said, "Of course your heart is as hard as steel. Don't tell me that if you didn't say so, I wouldn't know? You caused me to fall into my present condition. You're haughty and arrogant, you animal who puts yourself above other people! You Khitan prisoner of war who is worse than pigs and dogs, after death you'll fall into the eighteenth level of hell and be tormented by evil spirits every day. Why don't you dare to spill sweetened honey water on my wounds? You mixed breed dog, you bastard..." The more she cursed him, the more vicious she became. Clearly all the complaints and anger that she had accumulated in her heart had to be vented no matter what. Later she cursed him with obscene language, filthy and vile beyond imagination.

From childhood Xiao Feng had hung out with other beggars, so he was used to hearing all sorts of vulgar language. When he was tipsy and merry with the others, he would often use vulgar words to curse people. But it was really far beyond his expectations to hear Madame Ma, who had always been refined and elegant, now cursing him so vigorously and fiercely. Moreover, he had never even heard of many of these dirty and obscene words.

He didn't make a sound and waited as she cursed heartily. Her face had originally been pale, but during the

excitement of her venomous cursing, her entire face became very red and her eyes revealed a happy expression. After cursing him for quite a while, her voice gradually lowered and she finally said, "Qiao Feng, you traitorous dog, you caused me to reach this stage today. See if you don't die a terrible death in the future."

Xiao Feng asked calmly, "Are you done cursing?"

Madame Ma said, "For now I won't curse you, but I'll continue after I take a rest. You mixed breed dog without a father or mother! As long as this old woman still has one breath remaining, I'll never finish cursing you."

Xiao Feng said, "Very good, just curse me. The first time I met you was in the apricot forest outside Wuxi. At that time Brother Ma had already been killed by you. In the past you and I were total strangers, so how could you say that it was I who caused you to reach this stage today?"

Madame Ma said hatefully, "Ha, you say that the first time you met me was outside Wuxi. It's precisely these words, correct, all because of these words. You haughty, arrogant guy who thinks your martial arts are number one in the world!"

She started another bout of cursing that lasted for quite a while.

Xiao Feng let her curse him freely. When her voice weakened, he asked, "Are you done cursing?"

Madame Ma said hatefully, "I'll never have enough of it, you...you guy who puts yourself above everyone else, even if you're the emperor, you're not necessarily extraordinary."

Xiao Feng said, "Correct, even if I'm the emperor, what's so extraordinary about that? I've never considered myself to be unequalled in the world, just now...just now, the martial arts of that person were better than mine."

Madame Ma didn't pay attention to who he was talking about. She only mumbled curses, and after cursing for another while, she said, "You say that you met me for the

first time outside Wuxi, humph, so you didn't see me at the Hundred Flower Gathering in Luoyang?"

Xiao Feng stared blankly. The Hundred Flower Gathering in Luoyang took place two years ago. He had gone with many brothers of the Beggar Clan to the gathering, played rock-paper-scissors and drank wine, and had a carefree time. But no matter what he couldn't remember having met her at the gathering. He said, "That time Brother Ma went, but he didn't take you to meet me."

Madame Ma cursed, "What kind of thing are you? You're only the leader of a bunch of beggars. What's so special about that? That day at the Hundred Flower Gathering, I stood beside that yellow peony. Which of the heroes at the gathering didn't take a look at me? If you seriously didn't see me, then fine, I wouldn't blame you. But you clearly saw me yet ignored me. Your gaze swept past my face and didn't even stop for a moment, as if I were no different from an ordinary woman. Hypocrite, shameless man."

Xiao Feng slowly understood and said, "Right, I remember now. That day beside the peony flower, it seemed like there really were several women. At that time I was solely engrossed in drinking wine, and didn't spare any effort to look at whatever peonies, men, or women there were. If it was a senior female hero, then of course I would go up and pay my respects. But you're my sister-in-law, so if I didn't look at you, what kind of serious lacking in manners would that be? Why should you remember it and hate me so much?"

Madame Ma said fiercely, "Don't tell me that you weren't born with eyeballs? No matter how famous they were, all the heroes looked at me from head to toe. Some of the people of virtue and prestige, even if they didn't dare to look at me directly, when other people weren't paying attention, they still always secretly looked at me a few times. Only you, only you...humph, out of the more than one thousand men at the Hundred Flower Gathering, only you didn't look at me the

entire time. You were the great leader of the Beggar Clan, a hero famous throughout the world. At the Hundred Flower Gathering, the men considered you to be in first place, and the women naturally considered me to be number one. Since you actually didn't properly take a few looks at me, no matter how beautiful I was, what was the point? When over a thousand men toppled over for me, how could I feel good?"

Xiao Feng sighed and said, "As a child I didn't like to play with girls. After I grew older, even more so I didn't spare any effort to look at women. It's not like I didn't look at only you. Originally I didn't even pay attention to a woman who's a hundred times more beautiful than you. Afterwards, it was too late..."

Madame Ma said sharply, "What? A woman who's a hundred times more beautiful than me? Who is it? Who is it?"

Xiao Feng said, "It's Duan Zhengchun's daughter, A'Zi's older sister."

Madame Ma spat a mouthful of saliva and said, "Pei, this kind of sl\*tty woman, how could you still mention her..."

She hadn't finished her sentence when Xiao Feng grabbed her hair, lifted her body, and heavily threw her back down onto the ground. He said, "If you dare to say another half a sentence that disrespects her, humph, I'll let you have a taste of my venomous methods."

When Madame Ma was thrown down by him, she practically fainted, and all the bones in her body rattled. Suddenly she laughed loudly and said, "So...so our Great Chief Qiao was enchanted by this little b\*tch, haha, haha, so funny. You can no longer be the chief of the Beggar Clan, so now you want to be the husband of the princess of Dali. Chief Qiao, I know that you won't look at any women."

Xiao Feng's knees weakened and he sat down on a chair. He said slowly, "I only hope to look at her one more time, but...but...I can never see her again."



Madame Ma smiled coldly and said, "Why? If you want her, on the basis of your martial arts, don't tell me that you can't snatch her?"

Xiao Feng shook his head and said nothing. After a long time, he finally said, "Even if I have heavenly skills, I can't snatch her back."

Madame Ma was extremely happy and asked, "Why? Haha, haha."

Xiao Feng said in a low voice, "She's dead."

Madame Ma's laughter suddenly stopped, and she felt slightly apologetic, feeling that this arrogant and haughty Chief Qiao was somewhat pitiful. But immediately her face revealed a smile, and her smile became more and more happy.

Xiao Feng saw her smile and immediately realized that she was happy because he was brokenhearted. He stood up and said, "You murdered your husband, and even death can't wipe out your crime. What else do you have to say?"

When Madame Ma heard that he was going to kill her, she suddenly became afraid and pleaded, "You...you spare me, don't kill me."

Xiao Feng said, "Fine, I don't need to in the first place." He stepped out.

Upon seeing that he had stepped out of the room without even turning around, the anger in Madame Ma's heart grew again. She said loudly, "Qiao Feng, you dog traitor, back then I was angry that you didn't even take one look at me, so I told Ma Dayuan to expose your scar. Ma Dayuan was unwilling no matter what, so I told Bai Shijing to kill Ma Dayuan. The way you...you treat me today, your heart is still not the slightest bit moved."

Xiao Feng turned around and said coldly, "You murdered your husband just because I never took one look at you. Humph, who would believe such a huge lie?"

Madame Ma said, "I'll be dead any moment now. Why would I deceive you? Originally, what method did I have? I

could only hate you for a lifetime. Not only did those smelly beggars revere you as a deity, but who in the world dared to offend you? But heaven has eyes, and that day let me discover Chief Wang's will in Ma Dayuan's safe. What was so hard about stealthily tearing open this letter without damaging the envelope's sealing wax, and then sealing it again after reading it? I stealthily read that letter and found out information worth celebrating. Can you imagine how happy I was at that moment? Haha, that was precisely the golden opportunity for me to vent the resentment in my heart. I wanted you to suffer a complete defeat and fall from grace, to never be able to flaunt around as a hero. I wanted Ma Dayuan to expose you in public and let all the heroes of the world know that you're a Khitan prisoner of war. I wanted you to not only be unable to remain chief of the Beggar Clan, but also unable to stand in Central Plains, and even your life would be difficult to protect."

Xiao Feng was fully aware that her entire body already couldn't move, and that she would never be able to harm people again. But when such malicious speech reached his ears, he felt a chill on his back. He made a "humph" sound and said, "Ma Dayuan was unwilling to comply with your words, so you killed him?"

Madame Ma said, "Yes, not only did he not obey my words, but instead he ferociously scolded me. He said that from then on he wouldn't allow me to leave the house. If I disclosed even one word, he would chop this old woman into mincemeat. He had always obeyed me in everything in the past. When was he ever this hateful and severe? All along I had never cared for him or held him in regard. He offended me thus, so naturally this old woman had sufferings in store for him. After over a month, Bai Shijing stayed over as a guest. That day was the fourteenth of the eighth month; he came to my home to celebrate the Mid-Autumn Festival. He took one look at me, then took another look. Humph humph, this old pervert! I defiled my body and tempted this old

pervert to be crazy about me. I ordered the old pervert to kill Ma Dayuan, that useless weakling, but he was unwilling, so I said that I would expose that he had raped me. This old traitor was always honest and incorruptible in front of other people. But in front of this old woman, what disgrace did he lack? I told him, 'If you kill Ma Dayuan, I'll naturally follow you for life. Otherwise, you should straightforwardly kill me with one palm!' He was unwilling to kill me, so he had to kill Ma Dayuan."

Xiao Feng took a breath and said, "Bai Shijing was an unswervingly good man, but was ruined by you like this. You...you also gave the Ten Fragrance Bewitching Powder to Brother Ma to consume, and then you ordered Bai Shijing to break his throat, pretending that it was Gusu Murong who used the 'Throat-Lock Capturing Technique' to kill him, right?"

Madame Ma said, "Yes, haha, how could it not be? But I don't know 'Gusu Murong' or whoever. That was the old pervert's idea."

Xiao Feng nodded.

Madame Ma continued, "I ordered the old pervert to take the initiative to expose the secret of your birth. Pei, this old pervert was actually loyal to you, and was forced by me so fiercely that he picked up a knife, wanting to commit suicide. Fine, I let him off that time and sought Quan Guanqing, that neither dead nor alive guy. This old woman only slept with him for three nights before he obeyed me in everything. He beat his chest and said that he would take care of everything and would be sure to succeed. This old woman presumed that Quan Guanqing that guy alone couldn't topple you. Thus I also sought Elder Xu's involvement. You know everything that happened later, so you don't need me to say it again, right?"

Finally, the last suspicion in his heart had been unraveled, as to why Quan Guanqing was the chief conspirator against him, yet Bai Shijing was the one who

had been captured as a traitor. He asked, "Was it Bai Shijing who stole my fan?"

Madame Ma said, "Actually that wasn't him. The old pervert wouldn't do anything that wronged you no matter what. It was Quan Guanqing who persuaded Elder Chen. After you left your home, he entered your house and stole it."

Xiao Feng said, "Although Miss Duan's disguise as Bai Shijing was flawless, you still saw through her."

Madame Ma asked, surprised, "This little girl was precisely Duan Zhengchun's daughter? She was your beloved? Was she really exceedingly beautiful?"

Xiao Feng didn't respond, and raised his head towards the horizon.

Madame Ma said, "This little...little girl really scared me, and even mentioned the fifteenth of the eighth month, which is precisely the date of Ma Dayuan's death. But later I made two flirtatious remarks. When I said that the moon in the sky was so round and white, the old pervert had said on that day, 'There are some things on your body even rounder and whiter than the moon in the sky.' When I asked her if she liked to eat salty or sweet mooncakes, the old pervert had said on that day, 'The mooncakes on your body are naturally sweeter than honey and sugar.' But your Miss Duan's response didn't fit, so I immediately saw through her."

Xiao Feng finally understood why Madame Ma had suddenly mentioned the moon and mooncakes that night. So it had actually been the shameless talk between Madame Ma and Bai Shijing when they were privately communicating on the fourteenth night of the eighth month last year. Madame Ma laughed and said, "Qiao Feng, your disguise was terrible. As soon as I was aware that the little girl was up to no good, and then thought about your figure, hei hei, how could I not know that you were Qiao Feng? I was just about

to kill Duan Zhengchun, so by lucky coincidence I could use you to kill him.”

Xiao Feng gnashed his teeth and said, “You caused Miss Duan’s death, so this debt must fall onto you.”

Madame Ma said, “It was she who deceived me first, not me who went to deceive her. I was merely beating her at her own game. If she didn’t come to find me, then after Bai Shijing became the chief of the Beggar Clan, naturally I would have ways to make the Beggar Clan and the Duan family of Dali become enemies. This Duan Zhengchun then, hei hei, sooner or later wouldn’t be able to escape from my palm.”

Xiao Feng said, “You’re so vicious! You wanted to kill your own husband, you wanted to kill a man whom you had a love affair with, and you also wanted to kill a man who didn’t look at you.”

Madame Ma asked, “Why won’t you look at beauty that’s in front of you? Don’t tell me that I’m not beautiful enough? How could there be such a hypocrite like you in this world?” She was pleased with herself and her cheeks flushed as she said this. She was extremely excited, but finally her physical strength gradually weakened, and her speech was already somewhat discontinuous.

Xiao Feng said, “I’ll ask you one more thing. Who’s the Leading Big Brother who wrote the letter to Chief Wang? You’ve read that letter and seen the signature.”

Madame Ma laughed coldly and said, “Hei hei, hei hei, Qiao Feng, in the end is it you pleading with me, or me pleading with you? Ma Dayuan is dead, Elder Xu is dead, Zhao Qiansun is dead, the Stern-Faced Magistrate Shan Zheng is dead, Grandpa and Granny Tan are dead, Great Master Zhi Guang of Mount Tiantai is dead. In this world, only I and that Leading Big Brother himself know who he is.”

Xiao Feng’s heartbeat accelerated and he said, “Correct, it’s Qiao Feng earnestly pleading with you. Please inform me of this person’s name.”

Madame Ma said, "I'll be dead at any moment now. What benefit can you give me?"

Xiao Feng said, "To the best of my ability, I will obey whatever Madame commands."

Madame Ma smiled and said, "What else would I want? Qiao Feng, I hated and resented you for disdain to look at me carefully, to the extent that it led to such a disaster. It's not difficult for me to tell you the name of that Leading Big Brother, but you must hold me in your bosom and look at me carefully for a long time."

Xiao Feng knit his brows tightly and was really very unwilling. But it was true that she was the only one in the world who knew this big secret. His enmity as deep as the ocean depended on the several words that could come from her lips. Not to mention that her condition wasn't extremely difficult. Even if it was something extremely difficult and awkward, he could only force himself to do it. Her life hung on a thread, and she could stop breathing at any time. Threatening her would be completely useless. He thought, "If I insisted on refusing and she took her last breath, then I would never know the identity of the enemy who killed my parents. What's the harm in holding her and taking a few looks at her?" He said, "Fine, I'll comply." He stooped and held her in his bosom, and looked at her cheeks with shining eyes.

At this time, Madame Ma's face was entirely covered with bloodstains mixed with mud and dirt. Moreover, her complexion was wan and sallow because of the torment she suffered that night, so she was extremely ugly. Xiao Feng was already extremely reluctant to hold her in his bosom, and having to also look at her face, he couldn't help but knit his eyebrows.

Madame Ma asked angrily, "What? Do you hate looking at me?"

Xiao Feng could only say, "No!" This word defied his heart. Ordinarily, even if he met tremendous calamity, he

wouldn't keep his real thoughts to himself. But at this moment, he really had no other alternative.

Madame Ma said softly, "If you don't hate me, then kiss my face."

Xiao Feng said firmly, "I absolutely can't. You're the wife of Brother Ma. Xiao Feng attaches most importance to loyalty. How could I insult my friend's widow?"

Madame Ma said sweetly and intimately, "If you regard loyalty, then why are you holding me in your bosom..."

At this moment, someone outside the window giggled and said, "Qiao Feng, you're too shameless! You killed my older sister, and now you're holding my daddy's lover, kissing and carrying on a clandestine love affair. Aren't you ashamed?" It was precisely A'Zi's voice.

Xiao Feng had a clear conscience, so naturally he didn't take seriously the talk of an ignorant child. He said to Madame Ma, "Hurry up and say it, who is that Leading Big Brother?"

Madame Ma said intimately, "I told you to look at me, but you turned around. What are you doing?" Her voice was flirtatious.

A'Zi walked into the room, smiled, and said, "How come you're still not dead? What man would be willing to look at such an ugly wretch?"

Madame Ma asked, "What? You...you say that I look like an ugly wretch? Mirror, mirror, I want a mirror!" Her voice carried extreme panic.

Xiao Feng said, "Hurry up and say it, hurry up and say it. If you say it, I'll give you the mirror."

A'Zi easily picked up a bright mirror from the table and aimed it at her. Smiling, she said, "Take a look at yourself. Beautiful or not beautiful?"

Madame Ma looked into the mirror and saw her face entirely covered with bloodstains and dust. Fear, cruelty, malice, hatred, suffering, anger, all kinds of ugly feelings were gathered on her facial features. How was she in the

slightest the formerly delicate beauty who attracted people's tender affections? She opened her eyes wide and never closed them again. She was conceited in her beauty throughout her life, but before she died, she saw herself with such an ugly appearance in the mirror.

Xiao Feng said, "A'Zi, take the mirror away and don't offend her."

A'Zi laughed and said, "I want to let her know how ugly she is!"

Xiao Feng said, "It would be terrible if you anger her to death!" He felt that Madame Ma's body was motionless, and he could no longer hear the sound of her breathing. He hurriedly tested her breathing, but she had already stopped breathing. Xiao Feng was alarmed and shouted, "Aiyo, this isn't good, her breathing's stopped!" He shouted out as if he were facing an imminent catastrophe.

A'Zi pursed her lips and said, "Did you seriously like her? Is it worth making such a fuss when this kind of woman dies?"

Xiao Feng said, "What does a child like you know? I wanted to ask her something. She was the only person in the world who knew. If you hadn't interrupted, she would've already said it."

A'Zi said, "Aiyo, so I was bad again and spoiled your important matters, right?"

Xiao Feng sighed, thinking that a dead person couldn't come back to life. Getting angry would be useless. A'Zi, this little girl, was arrogant and willful by nature. Even her parents couldn't control her, let alone other people. On account of A'Zhu, he couldn't argue with her on anything. Presently he placed Madame Ma on the couch and said, "Let's go!"

They investigated everywhere. There were no other people in the house. The old maidservant had already fled to whereabouts unknown. Thus, they obtained fuel and ignited a fire in the firewood room. In a moment, the flames rose.



The two of them stood beside the house, looking at the flames coming out from the window. Xiao Feng asked, "Aren't you going back to where your daddy and mommy are?"

A'Zi said, "No, I'm not going to where my daddy and mommy are. Whenever my daddy's subordinates see me, they puff their beards and glare at me. I told daddy to kill them all, but daddy was really willful and didn't comply."

Xiao Feng thought, "You killed Chu Wanli, so naturally his friends would hate you. How could Duan Zhengchun kill his loyal and devoted subordinates for you? You're the one who's acting willfully, yet you say it's your daddy who's acting willfully. You're really a child who talks nonsense." He said, "Fine, I'm leaving!" He turned around and headed north.

A'Zi said, "Hey, hey, slow down, wait for me."

Xiao Feng immediately halted his footsteps, turned around, and asked, "Where are you going? Are you going back to your martial master?"

A'Zi said, "No, at this moment I'm not going back to my martial master. I wouldn't dare."

Xiao Feng asked, surprised, "Why wouldn't you dare? What trouble did you get into this time?"

A'Zi said, "I didn't get into trouble. I took a manual from my martial master. If I return, he'll snatch it back. After I master it, I'll return, and when my martial master takes it, I won't be worried."

Xiao Feng asked, "Is it a martial arts manual? Since it's your martial master's, if you plead with him to let you take a look, he won't refuse forever. Besides, if you practice it on your own, you definitely won't be able to understand many parts of it. Wouldn't it be better to have your martial master give you pointers?"

A'Zi pursed her lips and said, "My martial master said he wouldn't give it to me, so he won't give it to me. It's useless no matter how much I plead with him."

Xiao Feng really disliked this arrogant, willful, and spoiled little girl. Then he thought that she didn't need to be entangled with her notorious martial master, the Old Freak of Xingxiuhai, Ding Chunqiu. He said, "Fine, do whatever you want. I won't care about you."

A'Zi asked, "Where are you going?"

Xiao Feng looked at the raging flames in the rooms of the Ma house, sighed deeply, and said, "I was originally going to seek revenge, but I don't know who my enemy is. In my life, this huge revenge can never be sought."

A'Zi said, "Oh, I understand, Madame Ma originally knew, but what a pity that I angered her to death. From now on, you won't be able to know who your enemy is. So fun, so fun! Qiao Feng's fame for fighting prowess is outstanding, but thanks to my punishment, he's helpless."

Xiao Feng looked at her sideways and saw that her entire face was full of joy in calamity and delight in disaster. The raging flames shone on her face, making her cheeks seem as red and lovely as apples. Who would've thought that concealed underneath those innocent cheeks was vast and limitless malice? In a split second, his hot anger arose, and he wanted to heavily slap her in the face. But he immediately recalled that A'Zhu had pleaded with him before she died, and asked him to take care of her only younger sister in the world. He thought, "A'Zhu only made this one request of me before she died. How can I not comply? Even if this little girl is a huge traitor and evildoer, I'll do my best to correct her errors. Besides, she's merely young and ignorant, willful and naughty."

A'Zi raised her head and asked, "What? Do you want to beat me to death? How come you're not beating me? My older sister has already been beaten to death by you. So what if you also beat me to death?"

These words pierced Xiao Feng's heart like a dagger, and his chest ached. He remained silent and turned around uncaringly, taking large strides on the snowy ground.

A'Zi laughed and said, "Hey, slow down, where are you going?"

Xiao Feng said, "I can't reside in Central Plains, and I can't seek revenge for the deaths of my parents. I'm going north of the pass, never to return."

A'Zi inclined her head and asked, "Which path are you taking?"

Xiao Feng said, "I'm going to Yanmen Pass first."

A'Zi clapped her hands and said, "That's great. I'm going to Jinyang, so it just so happens that I'm taking the same path as you."

Xiao Feng asked, "What are you going to Jinyang for? How can a little girl go alone on such a distant journey?"

A'Zi laughed and said, "Hey, what's there to fear about a distant journey? I came to this place from Xingxiuhai. Isn't that even farther away? I have you as a companion, so how would I be alone?"

Xiao Feng shook his head and said, "I won't accompany you."

A'Zi asked, "Why?"

Xiao Feng said, "I'm a man and you're a young girl. Lodging on the journey would be inappropriate."

A'Zi said, "That's really a ridiculous argument. I don't think it's inappropriate, so why would it be inappropriate for you? When you were with my older sister, didn't you also travel during the day and lodge at night, one man and one woman, on a long and difficult journey?"

Xiao Feng said in a low and calm voice, "Your older sister and I already had a promise of marriage, so it's not the same."

A'Zi clapped her hands, laughed, and said, "Aiyo, I really couldn't tell, I knew that my older sister was well-behaved, but who would've thought that you were just like my daddy, and my older sister just like my mommy? You didn't worship heaven and earth to become husband and wife, but you already became a pair."

Xiao Feng shouted angrily, "Nonsense! Until death, your older sister was all along a proper girl, as clear as ice and as clean as jade. I strictly adhered to etiquette and respected her deeply."

A'Zi said, "What's the point in scaring me in a loud voice? My older sister was still beaten to death by you. Let's go."

When Xiao Feng heard her say "My older sister was still beaten to death by you," his heart softened, and he said, "You should still return to the Little Mirror Lake and be with your mother. Otherwise, find a secluded place and after mastering the martial arts in that manual, return to your martial master. What's fun about going to Jinyang?"

A'Zi said in deadly earnest, "I'm not going there to have fun. I have an important matter to attend to."

Xiao Feng shook his head and said, "I'm not taking you there." Saying this, he took large strides and left.

A'Zi used her qinggong and chased after him, shouting, "Wait for me, wait for me!" Xiao Feng ignored her and continued on his own.

Not long afterwards, the north wind shifted and it started snowing again. Xiao Feng charged into the wind and snow, taking rapid steps. When he thought of the injustice that had sunk to the bottom of the ocean, and of never being able to seek his huge revenge, his heart naturally became melancholy. But amidst having no alternatives, he abandoned the load of worries in his heart, which was actually a great relief.

## Chapter 25: Gray Journey through the Snow

Fan translation by Xaari [Second Edition] and d4rksinz  
[Third Edition]  
[www.spcnet.tv](http://www.spcnet.tv)

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### Translated by Xaari

Xiao Feng traveled over ten li and saw a small temple by the roadside. He entered the hall, leaned against the wall, and napped for over four hours. His exhaustion gone, he continued heading north. After walking another forty li, he arrived at the northern crossroad, Changtai Pass.

Naturally, the first thing to do was to find a wine shop. He ordered ten catties of white wine, two catties of beef, and a fat chicken. After pouring and drinking ten catties of wine, he ordered another five catties. As he was drinking, he heard the sound of footsteps, and a person walked in. It was precisely A'Zi. Xiao Feng thought, "This little girl is here to ruin my passion for drinking." He turned around and pretended that he hadn't seen her.

A'Zi smiled and sat down at the table opposite him. She called out, "Proprietor, proprietor, bring the wine."

The bartender walked over, smiled, and said, "Little Miss, are you also going to drink wine?"

A'Zi reprimanded, "Miss should just be Miss. Why do you need to add a "little" to it? Why wouldn't I drink wine? Get me ten catties of white wine first. In addition, prepare another five catties to serve later. Get two catties of beef and a fat chicken. Hurry, hurry!"

The bartender stuck out his tongue and didn't withdraw it for a long time. He cried out, "Aiyo, my goodness! Is Miss serious or joking? You're so small. How can you eat this much?" As he said this, he looked sideways at Xiao Feng and

thought, "She's directing this at you! Whatever you drink, she'll also drink; whatever you eat, she'll also eat."

A'Zi said, "Who says I'm so small? You don't have eyes, right? Are you afraid that after eating, I won't have money to pay up?" As she said this, she took out a silver ingot from her bosom. With a "dang" sound, she tossed it onto the table and said, "If I can't finish eating or drinking, then wouldn't I feed it to the dogs? What do you need to worry about?"

The bartender smiled and said, "Yes, yes!" He looked sideways at Xiao Feng again and thought, "She's really getting at you now and beating around the bush cursing you."

A while later, the meat and wine were brought up. The bartender carried a large bowl and placed it in front of her. Smiling, he said, "Miss, I'll pour wine for you now."

A'Zi nodded and said, "Okay."

The bartender poured a full bowl of wine for her and thought, "It'd be a wonder if you finish drinking this bowl and don't roll around on the ground intoxicated."

A'Zi held the bowl in her hands, brought it to her lips, and licked a bit. She frowned and said, "So pungent, so pungent. This inferior wine tastes really bad. Were it not for a few big idiots in this world who are willing to drink it, how could your wine be sold?"

The bartender casted another sidelong glance at Xiao Feng, saw that he had ignored her all along, and unconsciously laughed inwardly.

A'Zi tore a chicken leg, took a bite, and said, "Pei, it's smelly!"

The bartender cried out, feeling wronged, "This delicious fat chicken was still making "ge ge ge" sounds this morning. It's fresh and hot. How can it be smelly?"

A'Zi said, "Mm, maybe it's because your body is smelly, or else the other customer in your shop is smelly." Snowflakes were drifting outside, there was no one traveling

on the road, and Xiao Feng and she were the only two customers in the shop.

The bartender smiled and said, "It's my body that's smelly, of course it's my body that's smelly. Miss, you should take care when you speak. Don't accidentally offend another gentleman."

A'Zi said, "What? If I offend someone else, could he beat me to death with one palm?" As she said this, she picked up her chopsticks and held a piece of beef. She took a bite, didn't even chew it, and spit it out. She cried out, "Aiyo, this beef is sour. It's not beef, but human flesh. You people sell human flesh. What an evil shop, what an evil shop!"

The bartender panicked and said hurriedly, "Aiyo, Miss, be charitable and don't stir up trouble. This is fresh yellow beef. How can you say it's human flesh? How can human flesh have such a rough texture? How can it have such a splendid red color?"

A'Zi said, "Okay, so you know the texture and color of human flesh. I'm asking you, how many people have your shop killed?"

The bartender smiled and said, "Miss, you really like to joke around. Changtai Pass is such a large city in Menyong prefecture, and we're a sixty-year-old shop. Where's the reasoning of killing people and selling human flesh?"

A'Zi said, "Fine, even if it's not human flesh, it's still smelly, and only a fool would eat it. Aiyo, my boots have gotten so dirty from the snowy ground." Saying this, she snatched a large piece of delicious simmer-fried beef from the plate and wiped it on her left boot.

The outer layer of the boot had originally been splashed with mud. After the wiping, half the mud was removed while beef grease was smeared on, making the surface shine like a mirror.

Upon seeing her use the beef that had been diligently cooked by the great chef to wipe her boot, the bartender felt

his heart ache greatly. He stood to the side and sighed continuously.

A'Zi asked, "Why are you sighing?"

The bartender said, "This shop's simmer-fried beef has always been considered the best in the town of Changtai. If it's mentioned to anyone within a hundred li, he'll give a thumbs-up and swallow his saliva with "gu gu gu" sounds. Yet Miss uses it to wipe her leather boot. This...this..."

A'Zi glared at him and asked, "This what?"

The bartender said, "It seems too much of a grievance."

A'Zi said, "Are you saying it's a grievance for my boot? Beef comes from cattle, and leather boots also come from cattle, so it can't be considered a grievance. Hey, what other specialty dishes does your shop have? Name a few of them."

The bartender said, "Naturally there are specialty dishes, but the prices aren't so cheap."

A'Zi took out a silver ingot from her bosom, threw it on the table with a "dang" sound, and asked, "Is this enough?"

The bartender saw that this silver ingot weighed five taels, which was enough to buy two entire tables' worth of food and wine. He smiled hurriedly and said, "It's enough, excuse me, how could it not be enough? The shop's specialty dishes include carp cooked in wine, sliced white lamb, pork marinated in soybean paste..."

A'Zi said, "Very good, give me three portions of each kind."

The bartender said, "If Miss wants to try the flavors, I think one portion of each kind is enough..."

A'Zi said calmly, "I said I want three portions so it's three portions. Is it any of your business?"

The bartender said, "Yes, yes!" He called out, lengthening his words, "Three portions of carp cooked in wine! Three portions of sliced white lamb..."

Xiao Feng watched from the side, knowing that this little girl was clearly stirring up trouble for the bartender when she was actually making fun of him. Presently he ignored



her and minded his own business, drinking wine and appreciating the snow.

A while later, the sliced white lamb was brought up. A'Zi said, "Leave one portion here, bring one portion over to that gentleman, and place one portion on that table. Place a bowl and chopsticks over there, and pour good wine."

The bartender asked, "Is there another customer coming?"

A'Zi glared at him and said, "You're so talkative. Be careful or else I'll cut off your tongue!"

The bartender stuck out his tongue, smiled, and said, "I'm afraid that Miss doesn't have the ability to cut off my tongue."

Xiao Feng's heart jumped and he glared at him, thinking, "Aren't you asking for death? How can you dare to say such words to this rebellious little devil?"

The bartender brought the lamb to Xiao Feng's table. Xiao Feng said nothing, picked up his chopsticks, and ate it. A while later, the carp cooked in wine and pork marinated in soybean sauce were brought up in succession. There were still three portions, one for Xiao Feng, one for A'Zi, and one was placed on another table. Xiao Feng refused nothing and ate them one after the other.

A'Zi only took one bite of each portion and said, "It's smelly and only fit for pigs and dogs to eat." She snatched the lamb, carp, and pork to wipe her boots. Although the bartender's heart ached, he couldn't do anything.

Xiao Feng gazed outside the window and thought, "This little devil is seriously hateful. Now that she's following me around, there will be no end of trouble. A'Zhu entrusted me to take care of her, but this ghost spirit can take care of herself just fine, and I definitely don't need to worry about her. I should just avoid her. Out of sight, out of mind."

As he was thinking, a person in the distance suddenly walked over on the snowy ground. It was midwinter in the twelfth month, but this person only wore a garment of yellow

hemp cloth, as if he didn't feel the frigid cold at all. In a moment he was nearby and it could be seen that he was around forty years old, with shining yellow hoops hanging from his ears. He had a lion-like nose and a broad mouth. His appearance was rather vicious and strange, and clearly he wasn't from Central Plains.

This person arrived at the wine shop, lifted the curtain, and entered. When he saw A'Zi, he stared blankly, and then his face revealed a happy expression. He wanted to talk but restrained himself and sat down at a table.

A'Zi said, "There's wine and meat. Why won't you eat it?"

That person saw the unoccupied table filled with food and wine and said, "Is that for me? Many thanks, younger martial sister." As he said this, he walked over and sat down. He took out a small gold knife from his bosom, cut the beef, and used his hands to eat it. After eating a few pieces of meat, he drank a bowl of wine. His wine tolerance wasn't bad.

Xiao Feng thought, "So he's actually a disciple of the Old Freak of Xingxiuhai." He originally didn't like this person's appearance or bearing, but upon seeing that his wine tolerance was quite good, he felt that he wasn't actually extremely hateful.

Upon seeing that he had finished drinking the wine, A'Zi said to the bartender, "Bring this wine over and give it to that gentleman." As she said this, she dipped her hands into the bowl of wine in front of her. She stirred a little and washed off the meat grease on her hands, then pushed forward the bowl of wine.

The bartender thought, "Can this wine still be drunk?"

A'Zi saw his hesitation and noticed that he hadn't picked up the bowl of wine. She urged, "Hurry up and bring it over. He's waiting for his wine."

The bartender smiled and said, "Miss, you're at it again. How can this bowl of wine still be drunk?"

A'Zi's face hardened and she said, "Who says it can't be drunk? Are you contemptuous that my hands are dirty? Let's do this. You drink a mouthful of the wine, and I'll give you a silver ingot." Saying this, she took out a small silver ingot weighing one tael from her bosom and placed it on the table.

The bartender was delighted and said, "It's great to get a tael of silver for drinking a mouthful of wine. To say nothing of Miss merely washing her hands, even if it's water in which Miss washes her feet, I'll still drink it. Saying this, he picked up the bowl of wine and drank a big mouthful.

Bizarrely, when the wine entered his mouth, he felt like his tongue was being burned by red hot iron, and he was in acute pain. With a "wa" sound, the bartender opened his mouth and spouted out the wine. He was in so much pain that he bounced on his legs and shouted loudly, "My mother! Aiyo, my mother!" When Xiao Feng saw him like this, he was greatly alarmed. He heard his shouting become more and more indistinct. Clearly his tongue had swelled.

The wine shop's shopkeeper, great chef, and other bartenders rushed over when they heard the shouting. "What's going on? What's going on?" The bartender tore at his face with his hands. He was already unable to speak and stuck out his tongue, which had swelled to three times its normal size and was entirely black.

Xiao Feng was alarmed again and thought, "He's been acutely poisoned. This little devil soaked her fingers in the wine for a moment, poisoning the bowl of wine so terribly."

When everyone saw the unusual condition of the bartender's tongue, they all became frightened. They blurted out simultaneously, "What kind of poison did he come across?" "Was he pinched by a scorpion?" "Aiyo, this is disastrous. Hurry, hurry and ask for a physician!"

The bartender pointed a finger at A'Zi. Suddenly he walked over and knelt down on the ground in front of her. He kowtowed, making "dong dong dong" sounds.

A'Zi smiled and said, "Aiyo, I can't afford this. What are you pleading with me for?" The bartender raised his head, pointed to his tongue, and kowtowed again.

A'Zi smiled and said, "You want me to cure you, right?" The bartender was in so much pain that his brow beaded with sweat. He scratched his body everywhere with his hands, kowtowed, and cupped his hands in obeisance.

A'Zi reached into her bosom and took out a gold knife, exactly the same as the knife that the lion-nosed man had used. She grabbed the back of the bartender's neck with her left hand and brandished the gold knife with her right hand. With a light "chi" sound, she cut off a small section of the tip of his tongue. All the spectators shouted loudly and saw that the cut tongue was gushing blood. The bartender was greatly startled, but as the blood flowed out, the poison was removed. The pain on his tongue immediately disappeared, and after a moment, the swelling also receded. A'Zi took out a small bottle from her bosom, pulled out the stopper, used her pinky fingernail to gather some yellow medicinal powder, and flicked it onto his tongue. The blood flowing out of his tongue immediately slowed.

The bartender didn't dare to be angry but was unwilling to give thanks. His expression was extremely awkward, and he said, "You...you..." Now that a section of his tongue had been cut off, naturally he couldn't speak clearly.

A'Zi held that small ingot of silver in her hand, smiled, and said, "I said that if you drank a mouthful of wine, I would give you a tael of silver. Just now you spat out the mouthful of wine, so that doesn't count. Drink again."

The bartender flapped his hands and said unclearly, "I...I don't want it. I won't drink."

A'Zi put the silver back in her bosom, smiled, and said, "What did you say a moment ago? It seemed as if you said, 'You want to cut off my tongue? I'm afraid that Miss doesn't have this ability.' Right? But now you kowtowed and begged

me to cut it. I was almost about to ask you, 'Does Miss have this ability or not?'"

Only now did the bartender suddenly realize that this matter had occurred only because he had said one wrong sentence. His hatred and resentment reached their peak and he wanted to make a move immediately and ferociously beat her. But upon seeing that at both of the other two tables sat a tall and strong man who was clearly on her side, he felt timid.

A'Zi asked, "Are you going to drink it or not?"

The bartender said angrily, "I...I, your father..." He recalled that if he spoke thoughtlessly and cursed at her, he would very likely suffer again at her hands. Both scared and angry, he ran quickly into the inner room and didn't come out again.

The shopkeeper and everyone else discussed continuously and glared at A'Zi. All of them returned to their original places and substituted another bartender to take care of the customers. After seeing the circumstances from a moment ago, the bartender trembled with fear and apprehension, and didn't dare to say a single word.

Xiao Feng was extremely angry: "That bartender only cracked a joke and you punished him to be handicapped for the rest of his life. In the future he'll never be able to speak clearly again. She's so young, yet her behavior is so vicious."

A'Zi said, "Bartender, bring this bowl of wine to that gentleman's table for him to drink." Saying this, she pointed at the lion-nosed man. When the bartender saw her pointing at that bowl of wine, his entire body was already shaking. Upon hearing her ordering him to bring the wine to a customer, he became even more frightened. A'Zi smiled and said, "Ah, right, since you're unwilling to give the wine to the customer, then you must want to drink it yourself. That's fine, just drink it yourself."

The bartender was so scared that his complexion was an inhuman color. He said hurriedly, "No, no, this lowly person...this lowly person won't drink it."

A'Zi said, "Then hurry and bring it over."

The bartender said, "Yes, yes." He firmly held the bowl of wine in his hands and moved with fear and trepidation to the lion-nosed man's table. Out of fear that he would accidentally spill even half a drop, his hands trembled. When the bottom of the bowl hit the tabletop, it made "ta ta ta" sounds.

The lion-nosed man held the bowl of wine in his hands and stared at the wine within the bowl. He was approximately a foot away from the bowl, but he neither moved it closer nor placed it back onto the table. A'Zi smiled and said, "Second Elder Martial Brother, what's wrong? Little sister treats you to drink wine, but are you unwilling to give me face?"

Xiao Feng thought, "The acute poison in this bowl of wine is incomparable. Of course this person wouldn't give into provocation and lose his life for nothing. Even a person with strong internal energy may not necessarily be able to withstand the acute poison within the wine."

The lion-nosed man stared in thought for a long time before raising the bowl to his lips and directly drank it into his stomach with "gu du" sounds. Xiao Feng was alarmed and thought, "Could it be that this person actually has incomparably profound internal energy and can dissolve this kind of acute poison?" Amidst his bewilderment, he saw that he had already finished that large bowl of wine and placed it back onto the table. His thumbs were dripping wet with wine, and he casually wiped them on his lapel. Xiao Feng pondered for a while and understood: "That's right, before drinking the wine he had inserted his thumbs into the wine and held the bowl for a long time without drinking. Most likely he had applied the antidote on his thumbs and dissolved the acute poison within the wine."

Upon seeing that he had finished the bowl of poisoned wine, A'Zi's expression immediately became frightened. She forced a smile and said, "Second Elder Martial Brother, your ability to dissolve poison has greatly improved. Congratulations."

The lion-nosed man didn't pay any attention to her. He swallowed and chewed fiercely, eating eighty to ninety percent of the dishes on the table. He patted his stomach, stood up, and said, "Let's go."

A'Zi said, "Please do as you wish. I'm sure we'll meet again someday."

The lion-nosed man stared at her with strange eyes and said, "What 'I'm sure we'll meet again someday'? You're leaving with me."

A'Zi shook her head and said, "I'm not going." She walked over to Xiao Feng's side and said, "I have an agreement with this big brother. We're going to take a turn in Jiangnan."

The lion-nosed man stared at Xiao Feng and asked, "Who's this guy?"

A'Zi said, "What guy? Speak more politely. He's my brother-in-law and I'm his sister-in-law. The two of us are relatives."

The lion-nosed man said, "You gave me a problem and I solved it, so you should listen to me. Don't tell me that you dare to violate the rules of our sect?"

Xiao Feng thought, "So actually A'Zi told him to drink the poisoned wine in order to give him a difficult problem, but didn't expect that this person actually solved it."

A'Zi said, "Who said I gave you a problem? Are you talking about drinking this bowl of wine? Haha, so funny, I gave this bowl of wine to the bartender. Who would've thought that you of the magnificent Xingxiu Sect would drink the leftover wine that the smelly bartender drank. The smelly bartender drank it and didn't die either. What's so extraordinary about you drinking it after him? Let me ask

you, did the smelly bartender die? If even this kind of person can drink it, then how could I give such an easy problem?" These words were plausible but misleading, and it wasn't easy to refute her.

The lion-nosed man restrained his anger and said, "Master has commanded me to take you back. Are you going to disobey master's command?"

A'Zi smiled and said, "Master dotes on me the most. Second Elder Martial Brother, please go back and report to master that I met my brother-in-law along the way and will go to Jiangnan with him to have fun. I'll buy master some fun ancient jewels and then return."

The lion-nosed man shook his head and said, "That won't do. You took master's..." When he said this, he looked askance at Xiao Feng, seemingly afraid of divulging a secret. He paused and then said, "Master is thundering with anger and wants you to quickly return."

A'Zi pleaded, "Second Elder Martial Brother, I'm fully aware that master is furious and forcing me to return. Isn't he intentionally going to make me suffer? The next time master punishes you, I won't plead for leniency for you."

These words seemed to emotionally move the lion-nosed man. He became hesitant immediately and recalled that the Old Freak of Xingxiu rather doted on her and really took into consideration her words. He whispered, "Since you insist on not returning, then give that thing to me. I'll bring it back to master so that I have something to account for. His anger will also subside a little."

A'Zi said, "What are you talking about? What thing? I don't know anything."

The lion-nosed man's face sunk, and he said, "Younger Martial Sister, I won't make a move to offend you. Remember our friendship under the same sect. You should differentiate between good and bad."

A'Zi smiled and said, "Of course I can differentiate between good and bad. You kept me company and ate food



and drank wine, which is good; you want to force me to return to master, which is bad.”

The lion-nosed man said, “What will you choose? If you don’t hand over that thing, then go back with me.”

A’Zi said, “I’m not going back and I don’t know what you’re talking about. You want something that I have? Fine...” Saying this, she pulled out a pearl hairpin from her hair. She said, “If you want an identifying object to have something to account for to bring back to master, then take this pearl hairpin.”

The lion-nosed man said, “You really want to force me to have no choice but to make a move, right?” Saying this, he took a step forward.

A’Zi saw that he had easily finished drinking the poisoned wine, which meant that his poison skills were far better than hers and that he also had internal energy, so she was absolutely not his match. The martial arts of the Xingxiu Sect were sinister and vicious, and not a single move gave any leeway. As soon as the enemy was hit, even if he didn’t die he would be seriously injured. After being injured, he would suffer all kinds of torment and die extremely miserably. Except when martial brothers fought with their lives for ranking within the sect, they never exchanged moves or practiced together. Because if they exchanged moves, they had to distinguish relative superiority, and once they distinguished relative superiority there would be casualties. The martial master and disciples never performed their martial arts. After the Old Freak of Xingxiu passed down his secret skills, everyone practiced separately. As for who was stronger or weaker, each person only knew his own level. Only upon confrontation would who was stronger or weaker be revealed.

In accordance with the rules of the Xingxiu Sect, her test using the poisoned wine was equivalent to comparing their skills under the same sect, so it was no small matter. If the lion-nosed man had acceded, he would be subjected to her

control for the rest of his life. Now that he had drank the poisoned wine into his stomach without the slightest hesitation, unless A'Zi had another way to turn the tide, she would have to obediently listen to him or else she would be killed immediately. Upon seeing that the situation was urgent, she pulled on Xiao Feng's sleeve with her left hand and shouted, "Brother-in-law, he's going to kill me." "Brother-in-law," yet another "brother-in-law." Hearing this, his heart palpitated, and he remembered A'Zhu's dying words of entrustment. He wanted to make a move to send the lion-nosed man away, but upon taking a glance at the pool of blood on the ground, he thought of A'Zi's vicious handling of that bartender. It would be good to let her suffer a little and receive some discipline, so he gazed out the window and ignored her.

The lion-nosed man didn't want to kill A'Zi just like that. He only wanted to show how formidable he was and make her afraid so that she would obediently return with him. Presently he extended his right hand and grabbed Xiao Feng's left wrist.

Xiao Feng saw his right shoulder move slightly and knew that he would make a move against himself. But he took no notice of it and allowed him to grab his wrist. When the skin of his wrist came into contact with his palm, he felt extremely hot and knew that his opponent's palm had accumulated acute poison. He transferred vital breath above his wrist, smiled, and said, "How about it? You want to drink a bowl of wine with me, right?" He extended his right hand, poured two large bowls of wine, and said, "Please!"

The lion-nosed man continuously transferred his internal energy, yet he saw that Xiao Feng was cool and collected as if he hadn't felt anything at all. He thought, "Don't be pleased with yourself. Later I'll let you know how formidable my poison palm is." He said, "Drinking wine is drinking wine. Why wouldn't I dare?" He raised a bowl of wine and drank one big mouthful. When the wine reached his throat,

counter-flowing internal breath rushed up from his chest. He couldn't help but make a "wa" sound and spouted out the full mouthful of wine. His lapel was dripping wet with wine and he immediately coughed loudly, not stopping until a long time later.

Now he couldn't help but pale in fright. This kind of counter-flowing internal breath had clearly been secretly transferred from his opponent's vigorous internal energy into his own body. If he wanted to take his life, it would be as easy as flipping his hand. In this moment of fright, he hurriedly released his hold on Xiao Feng's wrist. Surprisingly, there was actually an extremely sticky force on Xiao Feng's wrist, and his palm was stuck onto his wrist, unable to break away. The lion-nosed man was greatly alarmed and tried to shake off forcefully. Xiao Feng didn't budge. It was like shaking off from an obelisk.

Xiao Feng poured another bowl of wine and said, "Old chap, you didn't get to drink the wine just now. After you finish drinking this bowl, how about we part ways?" The lion-nosed man struggled forcefully again but was still unable to break away. His left hand immediately struck violently at Xiao Feng's face. The palm hadn't arrived when Xiao Feng already smelled a rotten fishy odor as if emanating from a large pile of dead fish. Presently he struck out his right hand and lightly pushed. The lion-nosed man had used his full strength in this palm. When his palm arrived midway, it actually became crooked, but he was unable to retract it. Fully aware that his opponent had already made his palm crooked, he still involuntarily struck down and heavily hit his own right shoulder. With a "kala" sound, even his shoulder joint was struck.

A'Zi laughed and said, "Second Elder Martial Brother, there's no need to stand on ceremony. How come you hit yourself? This makes me too embarrassed."

The lion-nosed man was extremely angry, but his right hand was stuck above Xiao Feng's wrist and he was unable

to break away. He didn't dare strike with his left hand again. He struggled to break away for the third time but failed, so presently he summoned his internal energy, wanting to penetrate the acute poison accumulated in his palm into his enemy's body. Who would've thought that once his internal energy hit his opponent's wrist, it immediately bounced back, and moreover didn't stop at his palm and didn't even go upward. The lion-nosed man was greatly alarmed and hurriedly transferred his internal energy to resist. But this acute poison-infused internal energy was like the oceans and lakes flowing backward into the rivers. In an instant it passed his elbow joint, charged toward his armpit, and slowly rushed toward his chest. Naturally the lion-nosed man understood how formidable the toxicity of his own palm was. If it invaded his heart, he would immediately meet a violent death. He was so worried that his entire face was full of sweat that dripped down drop by drop.

A'Zi laughed and said, "Second Elder Martial Brother, your internal energy is seriously superior. In such cold weather you can still be dripping with sweat. Little Sister truly admires you so much."

How would the lion-nosed man have the leisure to pay attention to her ridicule? Fully aware that he was already so unfortunate, but unwilling to wait for death with hands tied, he desperately summoned his energy. If he could hold on for another moment, then all the better.

Xiao Feng thought, "This person has no enmity with me. Although he directly approached me with an evil scheme, why should I kill him?" Suddenly he retracted his internal energy.

The lion-nosed man suddenly felt that the sticky force on his palm was gone. The poison-infused internal energy that had nearly reached his heart rushed back into his palm. Surprised, he hurriedly retreated two steps, his face drained of blood. He panted for breath and didn't dare go near Xiao Feng again. He had just narrowly escaped from mortal

danger and returned from the gates of hell. The bartender was completely unaware and went over to pour wine for him.

The lion-nosed man raised his palm and struck him in the face. With an “ah” sound, the bartender collapsed face-up. The lion-nosed man rushed out the door and swiftly ran southwest. Only high-pitched whistling sounds could be heard from a distance.

Xiao Feng looked at the bartender and saw that his face had become completely black and that he had instantly met a violent death. He couldn't help but become extremely angry and said, “This guy is so abominable. I spared his life, yet how could he make a move to harm someone instead?” He pressed down on the table and wanted to chase after him.

A'Zi said, “Brother-in-law, brother-in-law, sit down. I want to talk to you.”

If A'Zi painstakingly called him by “hey,” “Chief Qiao,” or “Big Brother Qiao,” he definitely wouldn't pay attention. But when she called him “brother-in-law” twice, he immediately thought of A'Zhu and his heart ached. “What?” he asked.

A'Zi said, “Second Elder Martial Brother isn't abominable. Because he couldn't make a move to injure you, the poison couldn't be discharged, so he had no choice but to kill someone else.”

Xiao Feng knew that among the martial arts of unorthodox sects was the “discharging poison” technique. After the poison was accumulated in the palm, if it couldn't be used on the enemy's body, it had to be struck on a cow or horse and kill a domestic animal or else the poison would return to the body. Xiao Feng said, “To discharge the poison, couldn't he have struck an animal?” A'Zi had explained it so casually as if the reason was only natural.

Xiao Feng's heart turned cold. “This little girl's temper is so vicious. Why should I pay attention to her?” Upon seeing that the wine shop's shopkeeper and other staff were

rushing out again, and unwilling to create more difficulties, he sidestepped out the shop door and headed north.

He heard A'Zi following him soon afterward. Presently he accelerated his footsteps and after a few strides he had cast her far away. Suddenly he heard A'Zi say delicately, "Brother-in-law, brother-in-law, wait for me, I...I can't keep up."

Xiao Feng had previously always spoken face-to-face with her, and when seeing her expression and bearing, loathing would arise in his heart. At this moment she was calling from behind him and actually sounded just like the delicate voice of A'Zhu when she was alive. These two sisters born of the same parents had lived separately since childhood, but they had the same father and mother, and even the tones of their voices were extremely similar. Xiao Feng's heart quaked and he came to a stop and turned around. Through eyes blurred by tears, he saw a young maiden dashing over the snowy ground. It was truly as if A'Zhu had been revived. He spread his arms and called in a low voice, "A'Zhu, A'Zhu!"

In an instant, he thought in a daze of when he and A'Zhu had returned to Central Plains from Yanmen Pass together. The journey's atmosphere had been intimate, charming, and gentle. Suddenly, a soft body pounced onto his bosom and called, "Brother-in-law, why didn't you wait for me?"

Xiao Feng was startled and returned to his senses. He lightly pushed her away and said, "Why are you following me?"

A'Zi said, "You sent away my elder martial brother for me, so naturally I came to thank you."

Xiao Feng said indifferently, "You don't need to thank me. I didn't deliberately help you. It was he who made a move on me, so I had to defend myself to avoid dying by his hand." Saying this, he turned around and continued walking.

A'Zi threw herself forward to grab his arm. Xiao Feng tilted his body slightly, so A'Zi grabbed empty air and stumbled forward. With her martial arts, she could easily

steady herself, but she seized the chance to act coquettishly and fell on the snowy ground. She shouted, "Aiyo! Aiyo! What a painful fall."

Xiao Feng was fully aware that she was pretending, but upon hearing her delicate voice, the image of A'Zhu flooded his mind, and he couldn't help but sense a moist fragrance. At once he turned around and pulled her up by grabbing the back of her neck, only to see A'Zi laughing delicately. She said, "Brother-in-law, my older sister told you to take care of me. Why aren't you obeying her? I'm a little girl, alone and helpless. So many people want to bully me, yet you take no notice of it."

She said these words in a lovely and pitiful manner. Xiao Feng was fully aware that she was faking ninety percent of it, but his heart still softened. He said, "What's so good about following me? I'm not in a good mood, so I won't talk with you. If you commit outrages, I'll discipline you."

A'Zi said, "If you're not in a good mood, I can relieve your melancholy, so wouldn't your mood slowly improve? When you drink wine, I'll pour it for you. When you change your clothes, I'll mend and wash them for you. If my conduct is wrong and you're willing to discipline me, then there really isn't anything better than that. Ever since childhood my father and mother didn't want me and no one disciplined me, so I don't understand anything..." Saying this, the rims of her eyes became red.

Xiao Feng thought, "The two sisters are both talented in acting. Their abilities to deceive people are extremely brilliant and have really reached perfection. Fortunately I've long since known of her vicious conduct and definitely won't be fooled by her. What conspiracy is behind her determination to follow me? Did her martial master send her to harm me?" His heart shivered with cold. "Could it be that my great enemy is connected to the Old Freak of Xingxiu? Or could it even be the man himself?" But then he had second thoughts. "Xiao Feng is a magnificent man, so how

can he be afraid of a little girl's stealthy evil schemes? It would be better to beat her at her own game and allow her to come along with me. I'll watch out for any sly tricks she has up her sleeve. Perhaps I can even find out some information about how to seek my revenge from her." He said, "Since it's like this, you can come along with me. Let's make it clear first that if you injure or kill any more innocent people, I won't spare you."

A'Zi stuck out her tongue and said, "What if other people try to harm me first? What if the person I injure or kill is bad?"

Xiao Feng thought, "This little girl is so cunning. If she makes a move and injures someone, she'll use dishonest rhetoric and say it was the other person who made a move first. If it was clearly a good person, then she'll say she made a mistake." He said, "Don't bother with people regardless of whether they're good or bad. Since you're traveling with me, naturally no one will harm you. In short, you're not allowed to fight with other people."

A'Zi said happily, "Okay! I definitely won't fight. You can take care of everything." Immediately afterwards she sighed and said, "Ai, you're merely my brother-in-law, yet you discipline me so strictly. If my older sister was still alive and had married you, she'd still be disciplined to death by you."

Xiao Feng's anger arose and he was about to loudly berate her, but sadness followed. He saw a spark of cunning flash in A'Zi's eyes. He thought, "Why is she so pleased with herself after I said those words?" He couldn't figure it out at the time, so he chose to take no notice of it and strode onward. After walking a few li, he suddenly thought, "Aiyo, most likely she has a great enemy who wants to make things difficult for her, so she wants to trick me into protecting her. Actually, regardless of whether she's right or wrong, even if I hadn't said anything, as long as she's with me I definitely won't let her suffer."



After they walked several more li, A'Zi said, "Brother-in-law, I'll sing a tune for you to hear, all right?"

Xiao Feng made up his mind, "No matter what idea she comes up with, I won't allow it. The more I interact with her, the more advantageous it is for her." He said, "No."

A'Zi pouted and said, "You're so imperious. I'll tell you a joke then, all right?"

Xiao Feng said, "No."

A'Zi said, "I'll give you a riddle to guess, all right?"

Xiao Feng said, "No."

A'Zi said, "Then tell me a joke, all right?"

Xiao Feng said, "No."

A'Zi said, "Sing a tune for me, all right?"

Xiao Feng said, "No."

She asked seventeen or eighteen things in a row, but Xiao Feng didn't even think before flatly rejecting them.

A'Zi said, "I won't play the flute for you then, all right?"

Xiao Feng still said, "No!"

As soon as the word came out of his mouth, he realized he'd been fooled. Her question had been "I won't play the flute for you," and he had said "No," which meant he wanted her to play the flute. Since the word had already come out of his mouth, he paid no more attention to it. He thought, "If you want to play the flute, then play."

A'Zi sighed and said, "You don't want this, you don't want that. You're so difficult to serve. But you just had to want me to play the flute, so I can only obey you." Saying this, she took out a jade flute from her bosom.

This jade flute was strangely short, only about seven inches long, and was pure white, sparkling, and lovely. A'Zi placed it on her lips and lightly blew into it. A sharp whistling sound came out. Originally the sound of the flute should be clear and loud, but the sound emitted by this white jade flute was extremely sad and shrill, completely lacking in a cheerful melody.

During this time, Xiao Feng's heart changed slightly. He already knew her reason and sneered inwardly, "Right, so you've actually planned with comrades? An ambush is lying nearby to attack me. How could Xiao Feng fear you gang of rogues? I shouldn't be careless, that's all." He knew that the martial arts of the Old Freak of Xingxiu's sect were extremely insidious. If he was negligent, he would be plotted against. He heard the sound of A'Zi's flute getting higher, getting lower. Like the killing of a pig and the weeping of a ghost, it was extremely unpleasant to hear. Such a lively and beautiful little girl holding such a sparkling and lovely jade flute actually blew out such a sad and shrill sound. It showed even further how sinister the Xingxiu Sect was.

Xiao Feng ignored her and hastened on his journey. Before long he climbed a long mountain ridge. The mountain road was narrow and could only fit one person. He thought, "If an enemy were to lay an ambush, this would definitely be the place." Sure enough, after he had made only one turn in the mountain ridge, he saw four people blocking the path in front of him. All four people wore garments of yellow hemp cloth, their apparel and adornment exactly the same as the lion-nosed man he had met in the wine shop. The four people couldn't stand side by side, so they were lined up one in front of the other. Each person held a long steel rod.

A'Zi stopped playing her flute, halted her steps, and shouted, "Hello Third Elder Martial Brother, Fourth Elder Martial Brother, Seventh Elder Martial Brother, and Eighth Elder Martial Brother. What a coincidence that everyone is gathered here!"

Xiao Feng also halted his steps and leaned against the mountain wall. He thought, "How are they going to mystify and deceive?"

The foremost of the four people was a fat middle-aged man. He first sized Xiao Feng up and down for a long time before saying, "Hello, Little Martial Sister. How could you injure Second Elder Martial Brother?"

Alarmed, A'Zi asked, "Second Elder Martial Brother is injured? Who injured him? Is his injury serious?"

The person in the very back said loudly, "What are you being insincerely courteous for? He said it was you who ordered someone to injure him." He was a dwarf, and furthermore in the very back, so his entire body was obstructed by the three people in front of him. Xiao Feng couldn't see his appearance, but heard him speaking extremely fast, so he obviously had an impulsive temper. The steel rod this person held was actually the longest and largest, so it could be assumed that his bodily strength wasn't weak. It was predestined that he was short, but he was outstanding in other areas.

A'Zi said, "Eighth Elder Martial Brother, what did you say? Second Elder Martial Brother said that it was you who ordered someone to injure him? Aiyo, how could you use such an evil scheme? If master finds out, how could he let you off? Don't tell me you're not afraid?"

The dwarf flew into a rage and struck the mountain rocks with his steel rod, making "dang dang" sounds. He said loudly, "It was you who injured him, not me."

A'Zi said, "What 'It was you who injured him, not me'? It seems like you've confessed. Third Elder Martial Brother, Fourth Elder Martial Brother, and Seventh Elder Martial Brother, you've heard this with your own ears. Eighth Elder Martial Brother said it was he who killed Second Elder Martial Brother. Right, he must have used the 'Three Hidden Centipede Claws' to kill Second Elder Martial Brother."

The dwarf shouted, "Who said Second Elder Martial Brother is dead? He's not dead, and his injury wasn't from the 'Three Hidden Centipede Claws'..."

A'Zi interrupted, "It wasn't the 'Three Hidden Centipede Claws'? Then it must have been the 'Marrow-Sucking Palm,' your expert skill. Second Elder Martial Brother accidentally fell for your scheme. You're...you're too ferocious."

The dwarf stamped with fury and said angrily, "Third Elder Martial Brother, hurry and make a move. Take this little sl\*t back and ask master to deal with her. She...she...she's speaking nonsense, I don't know what she's saying, what things..." He had trouble speaking in the first place, and now that he was anxious, he spoke extremely fast and was even more unintelligible.

The fat man said, "It's not necessary to make a move. Little Martial Sister has always been well-behaved and obedient. Little Martial Sister, come with us." This fat man spoke slowly and deliberately, and seemed extremely amiable.

A'Zi smiled and said, "Okay, I'll do whatever Third Elder Martial Brother tells me to do. I've always obeyed you."

The fat man laughed and said, "Then there's nothing better. Let's go."

A'Zi said, "Okay, please do as you wish."

The dwarf in the back shouted, "Hey, hey, what please do as you wish? We want you to come with us."

A'Zi smiled and said, "You can go first and I'll come soon after."

The dwarf said, "Won't do, won't do! You have to come with us."

A'Zi said, "That's fine, but unfortunately my brother-in-law won't agree." Saying this, she pointed at Xiao Feng.

Xiao Feng thought, "Here it comes, here it comes. This act is nearly over." He leaned lazily against the mountain wall, hands folded over his chest, as if he didn't care about anything happening in front of him.

The dwarf said, "Who's your brother-in-law? How come I can't see him?"

A'Zi smiled and said, "You're too tall, so he can't see you either."

With a "dang" sound, the dwarf plopped his steel rod on the ground and flew over. Both his body and his rod rose above the heads of his three elder martial brothers. He

landed in front of A'Zi and said, "Hurry and go back with us!" Saying this, he grabbed at A'Zi's shoulder. Although this person's stature was short, he had a thick waist and broad arms. He looked rather imposing from the side and his movements were extremely nimble. A'Zi didn't dodge and allowed him to grab her. The dwarf's large hand was just about to touch her shoulder when he suddenly hesitated and stopped. He asked, "Have you already used it?"

A'Zi asked, "Used what?"

The dwarf said, "The Divine Wood King Cauldron, of course..."

As soon as he said 'Divine Wood King Cauldron,' the other three people shouted loudly in unison, "Eighth Younger Martial Brother, what are you saying?" Their voices were extremely strict and severe. The dwarf took a step back, fear showing on his face.

Xiao Feng pondered, "What's the Divine Wood King Cauldron? These four people's expressions are extremely solemn. They're definitely not acting. They lay an ambush here, but why didn't they make a move, but instead they argue among themselves? Could it be that they're worried they can't defeat me, so they're waiting for reinforcements?"

The dwarf said, "It's the Divine...Divine...that thing."

A'Zi pointed and said, "I gave it to my brother-in-law." As soon as she said this, the four people's gazes simultaneously fell on Xiao Feng, and all of their faces showed anger.

Xiao Feng said, "These people are seriously troublesome. I'm disinclined to pay attention to them any longer." He stood up straight slowly, suddenly spread his arms and legs, and leaped up over the four people's heads, vertically flying past them. This was both marvelous and rapid, and the four people neither saw him running before leaping nor bending his knees. Their vision had blurred and the wind rustled above their heads when Xiao Feng was already behind the four people. The four people shouted loudly and gave chase

soon after, but in an instant Xiao Feng was already tens of feet away.

Suddenly with a fierce “hu” sound, a heavy weapon was thrown at his back. Xiao Feng didn’t need to turn his head to know that someone had thrown a steel rod at him. He stretched his left hand behind his back and caught the steel rod. The four people shouted loudly and angrily, and another two steel rods landed in his hand. The weight was already a hundred and sixty or seventy catties, but Xiao Feng didn’t slow down in the slightest. With a “hu” sound, another steel rod was thrown at him. The sound of this steel rod flying was the loudest, so obviously it was the heaviest and probably thrown by the dwarf. Xiao Feng thought, “These barbarians can’t tell good from bad. I must show them what’s formidable.”

As he heard the steel rod flying toward the back of his head at a distance of no more than two feet away, he stretched his left hand behind his back and lightly caught it again.

It was already extremely difficult for the enemy to dodge and avoid the four people’s steel rods. It was expected that out of the four rods, one or two would definitely hit him. Otherwise, how could they rashly dispose of their weapons? But how could they have known that Xiao Feng would catch one after another like they were nothing? Everyone was both alarmed and angry, and hurriedly rushed over while shouting loudly. Xiao Feng let them chase him for a while and then suddenly halted his steps. The four people were running spontaneously and had trouble slowing down. They nearly collided into his body and stopped hastily, panting for breath.

Judging from how they hurled their steel rods and ran, Xiao Feng had already estimated that the martial arts of the four people were only average. He smiled slightly and asked, “What might be the reason behind all of you chasing me?”

The dwarf said, "You...you...who are you? Your...your martial arts are very formidable."

Xiao Feng laughed and said, "It's not really formidable." As he said this, he transferred his energy to his palm and noiselessly pressed a steel rod into the snowy ground. The earth on the mountain road was extremely firm and hard, yet the steel rod was gradually shortening. Before it was two feet from the ground, Xiao Feng released his hand, lowered his right foot, and pressed the steel rod down to the very bottom flat surface.

Of the four people, some of them had opened their eyes wide, and some of them had opened their mouths wide, unable to close them again.

One after the other, Xiao Feng pressed two more steel rods into the snowy ground. When he was about to insert the fourth steel rod, the dwarf leaped forward and shouted, "Don't touch my weapon!"

Xiao Feng laughed and said, "Fine, I'll return it to you!" He raised the steel rod in his right hand, aimed at the mountain wall, and thrust with force. With a "dang" sound, it was inserted straight into the mountain wall. The steel rod was about eight feet long, and five feet had been inserted into the rock. The steel rod had been inserted into extremely firm and hard black rock.

After transferring his energy and actually throwing so deeply into the rock, Xiao Feng felt happy and thought, "These past few months I've experienced so many worries and hardships. My martial arts didn't decline, but actually improved. Half a year ago, I'm afraid I wouldn't have been able to insert it so deeply."

The four people shouted loudly in alarm simultaneously, their faces showing admiration.

A'Zi hurried over and shouted, "Brother-in-law, your martial arts of the hands are so great. Hurry and teach me."

The dwarf said angrily, "You're a disciple of the Xingxiu Sect. How could you ask an outsider to teach you skills?"

A'Zi said, "He's my brother-in-law, so how could he be an outsider?"

The dwarf was anxious to get his weapon back and leaped, stretching his hand to grab his steel rod. How would he have known that Xiao Feng had already estimated the limit of his qinggong skills long ago? The steel rod was inserted horizontally into the mountain wall, about fourteen or fifteen feet above the ground. The dwarf's fingers fell short by a few feet, and he was unable to touch the steel rod.

A'Zi clapped, laughed, and said, "All right, Eighth Elder Martial Brother, as long as you can pull out your weapon, I'll go with you to meet master. Otherwise, you don't even need to think about it."

With that leap, the dwarf had used all of his energy, so it was the limit of his qinggong. Even leaping another inch higher would be extremely challenging. When he heard A'Zi saying such provoking words, he became enraged and leaped with force. Amazingly, the tips of his fingers actually touched the steel rod.

A'Zi laughed and said, "Touching it doesn't count. You have to pull it out."

In his anger, the dwarf's martial arts had surprisingly improved greatly. His legs pushed off the ground with force, and his short and broad body swiftly ascended. His hands actually grabbed ahold of the steel rod. But now his body was suspended in midair, shaking and dangling and unable to get down. He used force to shake the steel rod, but five feet of this eight-foot-long steel rod had sunk into the firm rock. Even if he shook for three days and nights, he wouldn't necessarily be able to get it out. His appearance was extremely comical and ridiculous.

Xiao Feng laughed and said, "I'll be leaving now!" Saying this, he turned around and walked away.

The dwarf wasn't willing to let go no matter what. He was perfectly aware of his level of martial arts. When he had



leaped and pulled himself up onto the steel rod just now, he was really just lucky. If he released his hands, landed, and leaped up for a second time, most likely he wouldn't be able to pull up. This steel rod was his cherished weapon. Its weight suited his hands, and it would be difficult to forge another one. He shook it with force several times again, but the steel rod still didn't move in the slightest. He shouted, "Hey, you'd better leave behind the Divine Wood King Cauldron. Otherwise, it'll cause no end of trouble."

Xiao Feng said, "Divine Wood King Cauldron, what kind of thing is that?"

The third disciple of the Xingxiu Sect took a step forward and said, "Your martial arts have reached perfection, and we're all full of admiration. As for that little cauldron, our sect regards it highly, but it's useless to outsiders who obtain it, so please return it. We will certainly thank you with a gift."

Upon seeing that they didn't seem to be faking it and didn't seem likely to be laying in ambush to attack him, Xiao Feng said, "A'Zi, take out that Divine Wood King Cauldron and let me take a look and see just what kind of thing it is."

A'Zi said, "Aiyo, I already gave it to you. It's entirely up to you whether or not to hand it over. Brother-in-law, you should still keep it."

Hearing this, Xiao Feng had already guessed that she had stolen a treasure of her sect. Clearly, she said that she had already given it to him in order to get him to obstruct calamity for her. Presently he decided to beat her at her own game. Laughing, he said, "You've given me too many objects. I can't figure out which one's called 'Divine Wood King Cauldron.'"

The dwarf, hanging in midair, answered at once, "It's a tiny wooden cauldron about six inches in height and has a dark yellow color."

Xiao Feng said, "Mm, isn't it just a thing? I've seen it before, but it's just a tiny thing. What kind of usefulness can

it have?”

The dwarf said, “What do you know? How can it be just a tiny thing? This Divine Wood...”

He was going to continue, but the fat man shouted loudly, “Younger Martial Brother, don’t talk nonsense.” He turned toward Xiao Feng and said, “Although it’s a useless thing, our master...our master received it from his father, so he can’t lose it. Please return it. We can’t thank you enough.”

Xiao Feng said, “I put it aside in passing, and don’t know where I put it. I don’t know if it can still be found. If it’s a really important object, then I’ll return to Xinyang to search for it. It’s just that the distance is too far, and backtracking is too troublesome.”

The dwarf rushed to say, “It’s very important. How could it not be important? Let’s quickly...quickly return to Xinyang to get it.” Saying this, he leaped down, not even bothering with his own weapon.

Xiao Feng stretched his hand and lightly struck his own forehead. He said, “Ai, I haven’t drunk enough wine these last few days, so my memory isn’t very good. As for this wooden cauldron, I don’t know if I left it in Xinyang or in Dali. Mm, or else it’s in Jinyang...”

The dwarf shouted loudly, “Hey, hey, what are you saying? Is it Dali or is it Jinyang? You talk about this place and that, but this isn’t for fun.”

The fat man knew that Xiao Feng was deliberately making things difficult. He said, “You don’t need to amuse yourself. Just return the cauldron intact and we’ll certainly thank you heavily with a gift. We definitely won’t go back on our words.”

Xiao Feng suddenly said in alarm, “Aiyo, this isn’t good. I’ve remembered.”

The four people asked in alarm simultaneously, “What is it?”

Xiao Feng said, "That wooden cauldron had been in Madame Ma's home. Just now I set it on fire, burning the house down to the extent that the roof tiles no longer exist. As for this wooden cauldron, after being burned in the great fire, would it break?"

The dwarf said loudly, "How would it not break? This...this...Third Elder Martial Brother, Fourth Elder Martial Brother, what's there to be done? I don't care. If master blames someone, it's none of my business. Little Martial Sister, go tell master yourself. I don't care."

A'Zi laughed and said, "I remember that it didn't seem to be in Madame Ma's home. Elder Martial Brothers, Little Sister takes her leave. You can discuss with my brother-in-law." Saying this, she tilted her body, and in a flash she rushed in front of Xiao Feng.

Xiao Feng turned around and spread his arms to block the four people. He said, "If you tell me clearly the uses and origins of the Divine Wood King Cauldron, maybe I can help you search for it. Otherwise, forgive me for not accompanying you."

The dwarf continuously rubbed his hands and said, "Third Senior Martial Brother, we have no choice and can only tell him, right?"

The fat man said, "Fine, I'll tell you..."

Xiao Feng's figure suddenly flashed, and he leaped to the dwarf's side. He reached and propped his hand below his internal organs and said, "Let's talk up there. I'll only listen to you and not to him." He knew that the fat man appeared to be honest and considerate, but he was actually extremely cunning and wouldn't say half a sentence of truth. On the contrary, the dwarf had a straightforward heart and a fast mouth, and wouldn't lie. He grabbed the dwarf's body and ran up the mountain wall. The mountain wall was extremely precipitous, and originally it wouldn't have been possible to climb up. But Xiao Feng summoned his qi and climbed straight up, rushing up more than a hundred feet in one

breath. He saw a protruding rock and placed the dwarf on the rock. Pressing one foot on the rock and one foot high in the air, he said, "Tell me!"

The dwarf's body was in midair, and when he looked downward, he couldn't help but feel dizzy. He said hurriedly, "Hurry...hurry and put me down."

Xiao Feng smiled and said, "Jump down yourself."

The dwarf said, "I'm Chuchenzi."

Xiao Feng smiled slightly and thought, "This name is quite elegant, but what a pity that your stature doesn't seem to be very well-matched with that of your martial brothers." He said, "I'll be leaving now. I'm sure we'll meet again someday."

Chuchenzi said loudly, "You can't, you can't, aiyo, I'll...I'll fall to my death." He pressed his hands against the mountain wall and secretly circulated his internal energy, wanting to grab onto the rock. But his hands were slippery, so how could he hold on? Although his martial arts weren't weak, he was at high elevation and surrounded by air on three sides, so he couldn't help being alarmed.

Xiao Feng said, "Hurry and tell me what's the usefulness of the Divine Wood King Cauldron! If you don't tell me, then I'll descend."

Chuchenzi said hurriedly, "Do I have no choice but to say it?"

Xiao Feng said, "It's fine if you don't say it. Goodbye then."

Chuchenzi pulled on his sleeve and said, "I'll say it, I'll say it. This Divine Wood King Cauldron is one of the three treasures of my sect and is used to practice the "Great Energy-Dissolving Skill." Master said that as soon as any pugilists from Central Plains hear of our "Great Energy-Dissolving Skill," they would be so scared that their souls would scatter. If they ever see this Divine Wood King Cauldron, they would smash it to pieces. This...this is a rare treasure and extremely important..."

Xiao Feng had long heard of the “Great Energy-Dissolving Skill,” and knew that it was nasty and sinister sorcery. Upon hearing that this was the usefulness of the Divine Wood King Cauldron, he didn’t bother asking further. He propped his hand under Chuchenzi’s armpit and ran straight down the mountain.

Swiftly charging down this precipitous mountain wall was even more rapid and dangerous than going up. Chuchenzi was so scared that he shouted loudly. He hadn’t even finished one shout when his legs already touched the ground. He was so scared that his face was the color of dirt and his knees were shaking.

The fat man asked, “Eighth Junior Martial Brother, did you say it?” Chuchenzi’s teeth chattered with “gege” sounds, but he still didn’t speak.

Xiao Feng said to A’Zi, “Hand it over.”

A’Zi asked, “Hand what over?”

Xiao Feng said, “The Divine Wood King Cauldron!”

A’Zi said, “Didn’t you say you left it at Madame Ma’s home? How come you’re asking me for it?”

Xiao Feng assessed her and saw that her waist was slender and her clothes were extremely thin. She didn’t seem to be hiding a large cauldron that was six inches in height. He thought, “This girl is extremely cunning. She follows me like a ghost and is extremely annoying.” He said, “This kind of thing is useless to me. I definitely wouldn’t take it and not return it. It doesn’t matter if you believe me or not. I’ll be leaving now.” Saying this, he took large strides and left the five people far behind.

The four people quaked from his divine might. They hadn’t even decided whether or not to pursue him when Xiao Feng had already gone so far that his whereabouts were unknown.

Xiao Feng ran over seventy li in one stretch. He found a restaurant and drank wine and ate a meal. That night, he lodged at the Zhou Wang Inn, circulated his energy for a

while, and fell asleep. At midnight, as he was dreaming, he suddenly heard several sharp whistles and woke up at once. After a short while he heard several whistles from the southwest, followed by several answering whistles from the northeast. The whistles were sharp, sad, and shrill, and precisely came from the jade flutes played by people of the sect from Xingxiuhai. Xiao Feng thought, "These people are nearby. I don't need to pay attention to them."

Suddenly, two "jiji" flute sounds could be heard from an extremely close distance within the small inn. Immediately afterward, someone said, "Hurry and get up. Great Senior Martial Brother has arrived, most likely having already captured Little Martial Sister."

Another person said, "Once captured, do you think she'll be able to live?"

The previous person said, "Who knows? Hurry and leave, hurry and leave!" The two opened the window and leaped out of the room.

Xiao Feng thought, "Yet another two disciples of the Xingxiu Sect. I didn't expect that even this small inn concealed these kinds of people. They probably arrived before me and made no noise, so I wasn't aware of them. Those two people said they didn't know if A'Zi would live. Although this little girl is wicked, I still can't let her die violently. Otherwise, how could I face A'Zhu?" Presently he also leaped out the window.

He heard the incessant flute sounds answering one another and gradually moving in a southwest direction. He followed the sounds and soon caught up with the two people who had left the inn. He followed the two people from over a hundred feet away, neither too close nor too far. He climbed over two mountain peaks and saw a pile of flames in the valley ahead. Approximately a foot above the flames, the color was pure jade green, ghostly and eerie, and extremely different from ordinary flames. The two people ran directly

toward the flames and prostrated themselves on the ground before it.

Xiao Feng quietly approached and hid himself behind a rock. He saw over ten people gathered beside the flames, all of them wearing hemp garments of the same color. Illuminated under the green flames was A'Zi, her hands bound in iron shackles. The green fire shining on her snow-white face made her look extremely strange. Everyone gazed at the flames in silence, placed their left palms on their chests, and mumbled indecipherably. Xiao Feng knew that every evil, unorthodox sect had their own strange ceremonies, so he didn't pay any attention. He had heard that Xingxiu disciple saying a moment ago that "Great Senior Martial Brother has arrived, most likely having already captured Little Martial Sister." He saw that there were old and young among the more than ten people who wore identical apparel. Considering their actions and expressions, none of them in particular seemed to exhibit an arrogant manner.

Suddenly, several gentle "wuwuwu" flute sounds drifted from the northeast. Everyone turned around, and facing the direction of the flute sounds, simultaneously bowed in greeting. A'Zi's small mouth tilted up slightly, but she didn't turn around. Xiao Feng looked in the direction of the flute sounds, but only saw the shadow of a person clothed in white drifting over. His feet were extremely fast and nimble, and soon he walked up to the flames and blew at it. The flames were suddenly extinguished, then immediately brightened, and with a "peng" sound, soared tens of feet into midair before slowly descending. Everyone shouted loudly, "Great Senior Martial Brother's miraculous abilities allow us to expand our horizons."

When Xiao Feng looked at that "Great Senior Martial Brother," he felt slightly astonished that this person was everyone's great senior martial brother. He thought it should have been a fifty- or sixty-year-old elder, but it was actually

a twenty-seven or twenty-eight-year-old youth. He was tall and thin, and his green face was suffused with yellow, but his facial features were rather handsome. Upon seeing his qinggong that enabled him to drift over and his fire-blowing skill a moment ago, Xiao Feng knew that his internal energy wasn't weak. But blowing out this green fire, then igniting it again, wasn't internal energy. He presumed that a unique fire-kindling powder had been hidden within the flute.

He heard him saying to A'Zi, "Little Martial Sister, you have quite some face. So many people have been mobilized because of you, having hurried thousands of li from Xingxiuhai to Central Plains."

A'Zi said, "Since even Great Senior Martial Brother has set out, Junior Martial Sister naturally has quite some face. But considering my patron, I'm afraid your numbers still aren't enough."

The Great Senior Martial Brother snorted and said, "Ever since you were little, Junior Martial Sister, you were raised by our master. You have no father or mother, so where did so many relatives come from?"

A'Zi said, "It's just that the names of my daddy and mommy are a big secret, so I can't just casually let people know."

The Great Senior Martial Brother said, "Then who is Junior Martial Sister's father?"

A'Zi said, "I'd scare you if I said it. If you want me to say it, then hurry and open my shackles."

The Great Senior Martial Brother said, "Opening your shackles isn't a problem. Hand over the Divine Wood King Cauldron first."

A'Zi said, "The Divine Wood King Cauldron is with my brother-in-law. Third Senior Martial Brother, Fourth Senior Martial Brother, Seventh Senior Martial Brother, and Eighth Senior Martial Brother weren't willing to demand it from my brother-in-law, so what could I have done?"



The Great Senior Martial Brother looked over at the four people Xiao Feng had encountered earlier that day. His face showed a smile and his expression was gentle, but the four people's complexions changed greatly, and they seemed extremely frightened.

Chuchenzi said, "Great...Great...Great Senior Martial Brother, this has nothing to do with me. Her...her brother-in-law's abilities were too great. We...we couldn't catch up to him."

The Great Senior Martial Brother said, "Third Junior Martial Brother, you speak."

The fat man said, "Yes, yes!" He spoke of how they had encountered Xiao Feng, how he had caught the four people's steel rods, how he had carried Chuchenzi up the mountain wall and forcibly interrogated him, and everything else. Indeed he concealed nothing. He usually spoke very slowly and in a cool and collected manner, but when facing the Great Senior Martial Brother at this moment, his voice trembled, as if a great calamity was ahead.

The Great Senior Martial Brother waited for him to finish, nodded his head, and said to Chuchenzi, "What did you tell him?"

Chuchenzi said, "I...I..."

The Great Senior Martial Brother said, "What did you say? Tell me."

Chuchenzi said, "I said...I said...that this Divine Wood King Cauldron is one of the three treasures of our sect, and that it's...it's...for practicing that great skill. I also said that Master stated that as soon as martial artists of Central Plains hear of our Great Energy-Dissolving Skill, they would be so scared that their souls would fly away and scatter. If they saw this Divine Wood King Cauldron, they would definitely smash it to pieces. I said that this was a rare treasure and extremely important, thus...thus I asked him to return it."

The Great Senior Martial Brother said, "Very good. What did he say?"

Chuchenzi said, "He...he said nothing and just brought me down."

The Great Senior Martial Brother said, "You're very good. You told him that this Divine Wood King Cauldron is used for practicing our 'Great Energy-Dissolving Skill.' I'm afraid he doesn't know what the 'Great Energy-Dissolving Skill' is. When knowledgeable martial artists hear this name, they would be so scared that their souls would fly away and scatter. Wonderful, wonderful. Is he a martial artist from Central Plains?"

Chuchenzi said, "I...don't know...know."

The Great Senior Martial Brother said, "Do you know or not know?" His voice was gentle, but such an unyielding and irascible person like Chuchenzi was so scared that it seemed as if his soul had left his body.

Teeth chattering with "gege" sounds, he said, "I...gege... I...gege... don't...don't... know...gege... know...gege...know." These "gege" sounds were from his upper teeth and lower teeth striking against each other, and it was difficult for him to prevent it.

The Great Senior Martial Brother said, "So was he so scared that his soul flew away and scattered? Or was he not scared at all?"

Chuchenzi said, "It seemed like he...he...gege... was fine...and didn't seem... to be afraid."

The Great Senior Martial Brother said, "Can you guess why he wasn't afraid?"

Chuchenzi said, "I can't figure it out. Please...inform me, Great...Senior Martial Brother."

The Great Senior Martial Brother said, "Martial artists of Central Plains are most afraid of our Great Energy-Dissolving Skill. The Divine Wood King Cauldron is necessary in order to practice this Great Energy-Dissolving Skill. Since this king cauldron has fallen into his hands, then we can't practice our Great Energy-Dissolving Skill, so therefore he's not afraid."

Chuchenzi said, "Yes, Great Senior Martial Brother is brilliant at understanding the enemy. Junior Martial Brother...Junior Martial Brother can't compare."

When Xiao Feng had encountered the Xingxiu Sect disciples earlier that day, he had felt that this Chuchenzi was the most straightforward and honest, so he had a fairly good opinion of him. When he saw him tremendously frightened of this Great Senior Martial Brother, he was quite inclined to rescue him. But who would've thought that the more he listened, the more he became unreasonable. This dwarf's words were contemptible as he desperately fawned and flattered. Xiao Feng thought, "This person isn't a good man. His life or death isn't important to me."

The Great Senior Martial Brother turned toward A'Zi and asked, "Who is Little Sister's brother-in-law?"

A'Zi said, "Oh, him? I'm afraid if I say it, you'll get scared."

The Great Senior Martial Brother said, "But there's no harm in saying it. If he's really a famous hero, then I, Zhaixingzi, will just keep him in mind."

When Xiao Feng heard him announcing his own name, he thought, "Zhaixingzi! How boastful! Judging from his motion of floating over a moment ago, his qinggong is extremely good, but he can't surpass Ba Tianshi of the Dali Kingdom or Yun Zhonghe of the Four Great Evils."

A'Zi said, "Oh, him? Great Senior Martial Brother, who are the best martial artists of Central Plains?"

The Great Senior Martial Brother Zhaixingzi said, "Everyone says, 'Northern Qiao Feng, Southern Murong.' Don't tell me that both of them are your brother-in-laws?"

Xiao Feng's anger surged. He thought, "You're babbling nonsense, fellow. See if I don't make you know what's good and bad."

A'Zi laughed and said, "Great Senior Martial Brother, your words are really amusing. I only have one older sister, so how could I have two brother-in-laws?"

Zhaixingzi smiled and said, "I didn't know you only have one older sister. Mm, even if you only have one older sister, it's not strange if you have two brother-in-laws."

A'Zi said, "My brother-in-law has a huge temper. Next time I see him, I'll tell him these words, and you'll be in for some suffering. I'm telling you, my brother-in-law is the Chief of the Beggar Sect, 'Northern Qiao Feng' whose might shakes Central Plains."

As soon as she said this, people of the Xingxiu Sect who had seen Xiao Feng were all alarmed and couldn't help but say "oh" in unison. The lion-nosed Second Senior Martial Brother said, "No wonder, no wonder. I accept my defeat at his hands."

Zhaixingzi knitted his brows slightly and said, "It'll be difficult now that the Divine Wood King Cauldron has fallen into the Beggar Clan's hands."

Although Chuchenzi was afraid, his talkative temperament didn't change. He said, "Great Senior Martial Brother, this Qiao Feng has long ceased to be the Chief of the Beggar Clan. You've just arrived from the west, so it may be assumed that you haven't heard of this recent major event in Central Plains and Wulin. That Qiao Feng, that Qiao Feng, has already been expelled from the clan by everyone in the Beggar Clan!" Since this matter didn't concern himself, he spoke much more smoothly.

Zhaixingzi exhaled, and his taut face immediately relaxed. He asked, "So Qiao Feng was expelled from the Beggar Clan? Is this true?"

The fat third disciple said, "Everyone in Jianghu says so, and they also say that he's not a Han but a Khitan. All the heroes of Central Plains want to kill him to be satisfied. It's said that this person killed his father, mother, martial master, and friends. He's despicable and lowly, and doesn't shrink from any crime."

Behind the mountain rock, Xiao Feng heard him recount his unfortunate experiences these past few months, and his

heart couldn't help but ache. Although his martial arts were unparalleled in the world and his courage and insight were outstanding, his reputation in Jianghu was so unpleasant. It was an extremely tasteless feeling to be despised by all the heroes in the land.

Zhaixingzi asked A'Zi, "How could your older sister marry this kind of person? Don't tell me that all the people in the land have died off? Or was she first raped and then married, forced into becoming his wife?"

A'Zi laughed softly and said, "I don't know how she married him, but my older sister was struck by him with one palm."

Everyone said "oh." These people were hard-hearted and malicious in conduct, but upon hearing that Qiao Feng had not only killed his father, mother, martial master, and friends but also his wife with vicious methods rare in the land, they couldn't help but feel ashamed for being inferior, and conceded defeat.

Zhaixingzi said, "The Beggar Clan is strong in numbers and indeed difficult to deal with. Since Qiao Feng has already been expelled from the clan, why should we be afraid of him? Haha!" He sneered, "What 'Northern Qiao Feng, Southern Murong'? That's just the flaunting speech of martial artists in Central Plains. I don't believe these two fellows can withstand the remarkable feats and marvelous techniques of our Xingxiu Sect!"

The fat man said, "Precisely, precisely, we junior martial brothers all agree. Great Senior Martial Brother's martial arts are as good as divine. Now that we've arrived in Central Plains, we'll slaughter 'Northern Qiao Feng, Southern Murong' together. We'll discourage the morale of martial artists in Central Plains and let them know how formidable our Xingxiu Sect is."

Zhaixingzi asked, "Where's Qiao Feng?"

A'Zi said, "He said he's leaving through Yanmen Gate. Let's pursue and find him."

Zhaixingzi said, "Right! Second, third, fourth, seventh, and eighth junior martial brothers, you five failed to overcome the enemy. What punishment do you deserve?"

The five people bowed and said, "We respectfully receive Great Senior Martial Brother's punishment."

Zhaixingzi said, "Now that we've arrived in Central Plains, we have many matters to take care of. If I punish you for your mistakes, our power will inevitably weaken. Mm, let me see, how about this..." Before he finished speaking, he raised his left hand and five blue fire sparks flew out of his sleeve, making "chi chi" sounds.

Xiao Feng's nose caught a whiff of the smell of burned flesh. He thought, "Good fellow, aren't you burning people?" The flames subsided, but the expressions of pain on the five people's faces became more and more terrible. Xiao Feng thought, "This person threw out fire bullets made of sulfur and phosphorous, and I expect they contained poison. So after the flames were extinguished, the poison seeped into their flesh, causing them to be in even more pain."

Zhaixingzi said, "These are 'Heart-Melting Bullets.' After you undergo some practice, your endurance will increase. The next time you encounter a powerful enemy, you won't immediately surrender and make our Xingxiu Sect lose face."

The lion-nosed man and fat man said, "Yes, yes, many thanks for Great Senior Martial Brother's discipline." The other three people circulated their internal energy to resist the pain and were unable to speak. After the time it took for an incense stick to burn passed, the low groans and gasps of the five people gradually ceased. During this time, the disciples of the Xingxiu Sect looked at the five people gnashing their teeth and resisting the pain with great difficulty. All of them trembled with fear and apprehension.

Zhaixingzi's gaze slowly turned toward Chuchenzi. He said, "Eighth Junior Martial Brother, you divulged our sect's

great secret and made our sect's great treasures vulnerable to destruction. What punishment do you deserve to suffer?"

Chuchenzi's complexion changed greatly, and he suddenly dropped to his knees on the ground. He pleaded, "Great Senior...Great Senior Martial Brother, at that time I...I spoke out recklessly...if you...you spare me, in the future...in the future I'll work like an ox and horse without daring to complain...without...without daring to think of complaining." Saying this, he repeatedly kowtowed.

Zhaixingzi sighed and said, "Eighth Junior Martial Brother, you and I are under the same sect. If it was within my power, I originally wanted to spare you. It's just that...ai, if I spare you this time, then who will be willing to obey Master's orders in the future? Make the first move! You know the rules of our sect. As long as you can defeat the enforcer, all of your wrongdoings will be exempted. I'm ready. Make your move!"

How would Chuchenzi dare to oppose him? He repeatedly kowtowed, making thudding sounds.

Zhaixingzi said, "If you're unwilling to make the first move, then receive my move!"

Chuchenzi shouted loudly, stooped to pick up two big rocks, and threw them forcefully at Zhaixingzi. He shouted, "Great Senior Martial Brother, excuse my offense!" Immediately afterward, he picked up and threw two more rocks. He leaped eastward with "hu hu" sounds and threw two more rocks. Like a ball of flesh, his body vertically rose a great distance. He knew that his martial arts were far inferior to Zhaixingzi's, but he hoped that he would block these six rocks so that he would have a chance to escape. He waved his sleeve and blocked the first rock and sent it in the opposite direction, toward Chuchenzi's back.

Xiao Feng thought, "This skill of borrowing energy is quite impressive. This is real skill, not an evil technique." Chuchenzi heard the wind behind his back changing from light to rapid, so he slanted his body and dodged by leaping

to the left. But the second rock that Zhaixingzi had brushed away followed immediately afterward, so he didn't even have the chance to catch his breath.

Chuchenzi's left foot had just landed on the ground when a light wind attacked his back. The third rock had already been pushed over. Every rock that had been thrown over forced Chuchenzi to take a large jump. After taking six large jumps, he returned to being beside the flames.

With a fierce smashing sound, the sixth rock fell far away. Chuchenzi's face was pale. He flipped his hand, retrieved a dagger from his bosom, and thrust it toward his own chest. Zhaixingzi lightly waved his sleeve and a blue fire spark flew toward his wrist. With "chi chi" sounds, it burned the acupuncture point on his wrist. Chuchenzi's hand loosened and the dagger fell to the ground. Everyone shouted loudly, "Great Senior Martial Brother is merciful! Great Senior Martial Brother is merciful!" Zhaixingzi waved his sleeve and a light breeze flew out toward Chuchenzi's body. His body burned upon contact. His clothes and hair ignited first. He rolled around on the ground, shrieking miserably. But he didn't die immediately, and the burned stench overflowed in all directions. The situation was horrific. Everyone in the Xingxiu Sect was so afraid that they didn't even dare to take large breaths.

Zhaixingzi said, "No one's talking, mm. You all think that I was too cruel and that Chuchenzi died unjustly, right?"

Everyone immediately scrambled to say, "Chuchenzi's death can't even wipe out his crimes. It was extremely benevolent of Great Senior Martial Brother to help him melt his body and bones."

"Great Senior Martial Brother is wise and resolute, and handled it extremely appropriately without being too lenient or too harsh. We admire you very much."

"This fellow divulged the secret of our sect, and caused calamity for Master's treasures for practicing martial arts. He should've died by a thousand cuts and suffered for seven



days and nights before being killed. Great Senior Martial Brother gave consideration to our sect's code of brotherhood. Even upon becoming a ghost, this fellow will be grateful for Great Senior Martial Brother's kindness."

"We've all committed wrongs. Please forgive us, Great Senior Martial Brother."

Countless shameless words mingled with Chuchenzi's wild shrieks. Xiao Feng felt indescribable loathing and detestation. He turned his body, leaped from his right foot, and quietly landed twenty feet away. Even with such martial arts, Zhaixingzi didn't notice. Xiao Feng was just about to leave when he heard Zhaixingzi asking softly, "Little Martial Sister, you stole Master's precious cauldron and handed it over to someone else. What punishment do you deserve to receive?"

Xiao Feng was alarmed and thought, "I'm afraid that the punishment A'Zi receives will be ten times more wretched than Chuchenzi's. If I wave my sleeve and leave, how can I be at ease?" At once he turned around and quietly returned to his original hiding place.

A'Zi said, "It's true that I've violated Master's rules. Great Senior Martial Brother, do you want the precious cauldron back?"

Zhaixingzi said, "This is one of the three treasures of our sect, so of course it must be reclaimed. How can it fall into the hands of an outsider?"

A'Zi said, "My brother-in-law doesn't have a very good temper. I gave the precious cauldron to him, so if I ask him to give it back, he'll definitely return it to me intact. If an outsider asks him for it, do you think he'll give it back?"

Zhaixingzi made an "mm" sound and said, "That's hard to say. If the precious cauldron is damaged, then your wrongdoings will increase."

A'Zi said, "If you ask him for it, he won't give it back no matter what. No matter how good Great Senior Martial

Brother's martial arts are, at most you can only kill him. Reclaiming the precious cauldron is a million times harder."

Zhaixingzi muttered, "Then what do you have in mind?"

A'Zi said, "Release me and let me leave through Yanmen Gate alone to get the precious cauldron back from my brother-in-law. This is called using an achievement to atone for a wrongdoing. But I need to be promised that I won't be punished in the future."

Zhaixingzi said, "This sounds reasonable. But Little Martial Sister, wouldn't Great Senior Martial Brother's face be completely peeled by you? Afterward, I'd never be able to remain as the Xingxiu Sect's Great Senior Martial Brother. If I set you free to escape without a trace with your brother-in-law, where would I find you? We must have this precious cauldron, but as long as the secret isn't divulged, the one surnamed Qiao won't necessarily destroy it hastily. Little Martial Sister, make your move. As long as you can defeat me, you'll become the Xingxiu Sect's Great Senior Martial Sister, and I'll have to listen to your orders and receive your discipline."

Only now did Xiao Feng realize, "So actually their ranking is determined by their martial arts, not their order of joining the sect. Thus he's the Great Senior Martial Brother even though he's so young. Many people who are older than him are his junior disciple brothers. In that case, these people must frequently fight and kill each other. What code of brotherhood under the same sect can possibly exist?"

But he didn't know that this rule was precisely responsible for the Xingxiu Sect's martial arts becoming stronger with each generation. The Great Senior Martial Brother had enormous power. If a junior martial brother refused to obey, he could use martial arts to rebel, and martial arts would determine who was superior and who was inferior. If the Great Senior Martial Brother triumphed, then naturally the junior martial brother would be killed or punished without resistance. If the junior martial brother

triumphed, he would be promoted to Great Senior Martial Brother immediately and execute the former Great Senior Martial Brother. The master would watch with his hands in his sleeves and definitely wouldn't intervene. Under this rule, everyone strived to improve for self-preservation. On the surface, they had to remain calm and collected in order to make it seem like their martial arts were weak. This would prevent provoking the Great Senior Martial Brother's suspicion and jealousy. Chuchenzi's bodily strength was formidable. His steel rod was long, thick, and extremely heavy. Although he ranked eighth, he had provoked the Great Senior Martial Brother's jealousy long ago. Thus he had found an excuse to exterminate him. Members of other sects often practiced to a certain level and then ceased to improve, while members of the Xingxiu Sect didn't dare to be lazy for even half a day, and were always diligently practicing. Naturally the Great Senior Martial Brother was always anxious and apprehensive, fearful that every junior martial brother would challenge him. On the other hand, the junior martial brothers were always worried that the Great Senior Martial Brother would target them. However, as long as their martial arts were strong enough and the Great Senior Martial Brother wasn't certain of victory, he wouldn't rashly initiate a dispute.

A'Zi had originally thought that Zhaixingzi wouldn't harm her on account of the precious cauldron. Unexpectedly, he wasn't fooled and wanted to make a move immediately. She was now so scared that her pretty face had lost color. Fate had dropped down on her in the blink of an eye. She said in a trembling voice, "My hands and feet have been shackled by them, so how can I make moves or return your moves? You want to harm me but don't do it openly and honestly, and instead use such a crafty scheme."

Zhaixingzi said, "Fine! I'll release you first." Saying this, he waved his sleeve and a gust of strong energy shot into the flames. A fine spark of green fire separated from the

flames like a liquid thread and shot toward the iron shackles on A'Zi's hands.

Xiao Feng saw extremely clearly that this thread of fire wasn't directed at A'Zi's body. After two "chi chi" sounds, A'Zi's hands parted, and the iron shackles broke. But the two iron rings were still bound around her hands. The green fire suddenly withdrew and then shot forward again, this time aiming for the iron shackles on her feet. After just a moment, the iron shackles burned and broke. The first time Xiao Feng saw the green fire melting the iron shackles, he couldn't help feeling amazed at Zhaixingzi's impressive internal energy. When he saw the green fire burning the iron shackles on her feet, this time he saw clearly that wherever the green fire went, the iron shackles would immediately change color. It seemed that there was something eccentric about the flames, and it wasn't purely related to internal energy.

Members of the Xingxiu Sect praised unceasingly, "Great Senior Martial Brother's internal energy is seriously exceptional."

"We've never seen or even heard of such prowess. At present, apart from Master, Great Senior Martial Brother is certainly unrivalled in the world."

"What 'Qiao Feng in the North, Murong in the South'? They're not even fit to wipe Great Senior Martial Brother's boots."

"Little Martial Sister, now you know who's formidable, right? What a pity that it's too late for regret."

They scrambled to continuously make such remarks, which made Zhaixingzi smile. He nodded slightly and looked sideways at A'Zi. Although A'Zi was clever, she couldn't think of any brilliant schemes to help her escape from the difficult situation before her. She only hoped that they would speak endlessly and Zhaixingzi would delay in making his move. But the repetitive remarks had been tossed about for

a long time, and when they couldn't think of anything new to say, their voices gradually lowered.

Zhaixingzi said slowly, "Little Martial Sister, just make your move!"

A'Zi said in a trembling voice, "I won't make a move."

Zhaixingzi said, "Why? I think it's better if you make a move."

A'Zi said, "I won't fight with you. I know clearly that I can't defeat you, so why should I waste my energy? If you want to kill me, then don't hesitate."

Zhaixingzi sighed and said, "I don't actually want to kill you. It would be a pity to kill such a cute and pretty little girl like you. But I have no choice but to carry it out. Little Martial Sister, just make your move. If you kill me, you can become the Great Senior Martial Sister. In the Xingxiu Sect, apart from Master, everyone must obey your orders."

A'Zi said, "A little girl like me will never, ever be able to surpass you. You don't need to be jealous of me."

Zhaixingzi sighed and said, "If you didn't commit such a huge crime, naturally I would never make things difficult for you. Now...mm...however much I would like to help you, I can't. Little Martial Sister, receive my move!" Saying this, he waved his sleeve, and a gust of strong wind rushed toward the flames. A green fire spark shot out at A'Zi, as if he didn't want to kill her immediately, but instead wanted to use the flames to do it extremely slowly.

A'Zi cried out in fear and jumped two steps to the right. The flames followed her. A'Zi retreated another step, her back already leaning against the large rock that Xiao Feng was hiding behind. Zhaixingzi circulated his internal energy and the flames pressed upon her. A'Zi had nowhere left to retreat and was just about to jump sideways. Zhaixingzi waved his sleeve and two gusts of strong wind attacked the left and right sides separately. This caused her to be unable to dodge while the green flames closed in on her.

Xiao Feng saw that the green fire was only two feet away from her face. It came closer by an inch, then another inch. He said in a low voice, "Don't be afraid. I'll help you." Saying this, he reached out from behind the large rock and pressed his hands against her back. He said, "Circulate your energy and strike at the flames."

A'Zi had been so scared that her soul might as well have scattered. Upon suddenly hearing Xiao Feng's voice, she was really overjoyed, and sent out her palm without even thinking. By that time, Xiao Feng's internal energy had already poured into her body, so the strength of her palm was vigorous. The green flames suddenly withdrew two feet.

Zhaixingzi was shocked. A'Zi had been meant at the altar ready to be sacrificed, so he wanted to show off his martial arts and make the green fire hover around her face. He wanted her to loudly cry out in fear and take her life only after displaying enough of his might in front of the sect members. Who would've thought that at such a young age, she had such formidable internal energy? It was really beyond his expectations. After Master imparted the Xingxiu Sect's martial arts, everyone practiced alone. What level they reached couldn't be known unless they fought enemies together or destroyed each other. Thus, when A'Zi sent out her palm and forced back the green fire, everyone said "oh" in astonishment, but no one suspected that someone was secretly helping her. They only thought that A'Zi was naturally intelligent and had secretly practiced her martial arts to a profound level.

Zhaixingzi circulated his energy and shot the green fire back at A'Zi's face again. This time, the energy he used was extremely ferocious, and the green fire's speed was extremely fast. A'Zi squeaked, not knowing how the energy that had supported her had already disappeared. She dodged and the green fire shot at the rock, making "chi chi" sounds.

Xiao Feng said in a low voice, "Send out your left palm to partition the flames!"

A'Zi thought, "This technique is quite marvelous!" She raised her left hand, and with the force of her palm pushed toward the middle of the flames. The green fire immediately broke into two sections. The front half of the flames, lacking energy close behind it, burned on the rock for a while and gradually weakened.

Zhaixingzi thought, "If these flames are extinguished, then I would be showing a loss in front of all these sect members. How can I prevent this?"

At once he circulated his palm energy and shot the green fire at the rock again, intending to revive the green fire that had lost its roots.

A'Zi felt the abundant internal energy from his palms pouring into her back. If she didn't expel it, her own body could even explode. She waved her right hand hurriedly and struck directly. Xiao Feng's internal energy was incomparably profound, so even though the power in A'Zi's body decreased, if she was good at making use of it and could catch Zhaixingzi off-guard, she could very likely secure victory in one strike. But she was extremely alarmed and the palm she sent out was too rushed. With a "hu" sound, the thin thread of green fire was extinguished, but although she had won, she hadn't been able to harm Zhaixingzi at all.

Translated by d4rksinz

ZhaiXingZi was startled, he slanted his left palm and slap, a stream of green flame rise up from the bonfire and shoot towards AhZi. However the flame was much thicker this time, its power relentless, it shone jade green light on AhZi's head and face. AhZi send out her palm force to resist the green flame and prevent it from coming closer. At once the green flame stopped in midair and remained motionless, the flame advanced one to two inches but retreated one to two inched. Amid the darkness, the flame was like a green

snake reclining in the air, it swayed lightly, its color bright and weird, the ray of light flickered indefinitely.

ZhaiXingZi shouted out in a stern voice, his palm force was even more vigorous, two 'chi chi' sound emitted from the green flame, two stream of fire burst out from the flame and attacked the left and right of AhZi. The green flame was made of saltpeter sulfur, muscovite and various substance, the mixture was then ignited, it's nothing unusual, under the influence of internal energy it can be turned into flame and used to injure others, its power extremely fierce. Xiao Feng made a tiny movement with his left palm, a burst of palm force pushed out lightly, two ends of AhZi's belt rose up, one floated and one brushed, the two streams of fire was reflected and shot incomparably fast towards ZhaiXingZi.

ZhaiXingZi was so frightened that he became stupefied, while staring blankly the two flame already reached the front of his body, he hastily leaped up, a stream of flame flew under his feet. Two younger martial brother cheered: "Excellent skill, senior martial brother is amazing!" They have yet to finish their applause as the second flame shoot towards his abdomen. ZhaiXingZi was in midair, how can he rise up further? There was a 'chi' sound, the flame burnt his belly. With an "Ah" sound ZhaiXingZi cried out loudly and fell down, the stream of green flame also returned back into the bonfire.

The crowd of disciples gazed at AhZi, their faces showed reverence, they had the same thoughts: "It seems junior martial sister's power is not weak, senior martial brother might not be able to score a victory, it's best if I don't cheer so loudly." After their Master imparted the martial arts of XingXiu Sect, everyone will train by themselves, nobody knows each other's attainment until they fight against the enemy or against each other. Astoundingly, AhZi was able to reverse the flame and used it to injure senior martial brother, although everyone was in awe but nobody suspected someone was hiding nearby and providing



assistance, they assumed AhZi was gifted with innate talent and secretly trained her skills to extremely profound level.

ZhaiXingZi's expression was gloomy, he bit the tip of his tongue forcefully and sprayed a mouthful of blood at the bonfire. The bonfire suddenly became dark, immediately after it became very bright, the light was so bright that everyone can hardly open their eyes. The crowd of disciples cannot help but cheer loudly: "Senior martial brother's internal energy is truly powerful, it broaden our horizons." ZhaiXingZi spinned his body violently, he's like a spinning top and revolved around ten times, he brushed out his sleeves, the entire bonfire rose up off the ground, a mountain of firewall pressed down towards AhZi.

Xiao Feng knew that ZhaiXingZi employed an extremely powerful heterodox skill as he condensed his entire lifetime of internal energy into this attack. The green flame arrived rapidly, it's about to land on AhZi's body, Xiao Feng had no alternative but to send out both of his palm, he smacked two bursts of strong wind towards AhZi's sleeves. Under the reflection of the green flame, the purple colored sleeves of AhZi floated up and moved outward, the force delivered by Xiao Feng pushed towards the green flame wall.

The green firewall was at a standstill in the air, little by little it moved towards ZhaiXingZi. ZhaiXingZi was greatly alarmed, he bit down the tip of his tongue again and sprayed another mouthful of blood at the flame, the flame flourished and reverted back, however it advanced only two chi before being reverted back again by Xiao Feng's internal energy. ZhaiXingZi's face did not have the slightest bit of color, he spat mouthful after mouthful of blood at the flame repeatedly. For every mouthful of blood he sprayed, his internal energy will decrease by a small portion, however before the vigorous internal energy of Xiao Feng how can the green flame advance another half chi?

Xiao Feng detected the opposing internal energy is getting weaker and weaker, it's akin to an oil lamp on the

verge of drying up, he gathered his energy and said to AhZi: "Ask him to admit defeat, there is no need to fight anymore."

AhZi shouted out: "Senior martial brother, quickly kneel down and beg for forgiveness, I may spare your life. Admit defeat!"

ZhaiXingZi was abnormally frightened, he knew his life will end in an instant, after listening to AhZi's words he quickly nodded his head. AhZi said: "Why don't you open your mouth to speak? You refuse to admit defeat?" ZhaiXingZi nodded his head again and again, but he did not open his mouth to speak, he's focusing all his strength to resist the opposing palm force, if he open his mouth his energy will halt and the green flame will sweep towards him and burn him to death immediately.

The crowd of disciples started mocking and abusing him: "ZhaiXingZi, you lost in a fight, why don't you kneel down and kowtow!"

"Little martial sister is magnanimous and spared your life, you are still afraid of losing face? Open your mouth and speak!"

"Little martial sister tidied up Sect matters today, such glorious achievement, it's truly the great restoration of our XingXiu Sect."

"You conspired against our revered Master and aligned yourself with Shaolin, fortunately little martial sister exposed your deceit. Such disgraceful bastard, utterly shameless!"

"ZhaiXingZi, you stole the [Divine Wooden King Tripod], yet you made false counter-charge and accuse little martial sister, you must be tired of living."

This bunch of disciples acted pragmatically and took advantage of the situation, they flattered the strong and took advantage of the weak, once they see ZhaiXingZi occupy a disadvantaged position they immediately became hostile, just a few moments ago, these people praised their senior martial brother as a great hero unrivalled through all

ages, but now they cursed and berated him, he was worse off than pigs and dogs.

Xiao Feng thought to himself: "The disciples of Old Freak Of XingXiu have such low moral quality, AhZi associated with them since childhood, naturally her conduct will be improper as well." Seeing ZhaiXingZi extremely sorrowful state, at once he refrained from meting out harsh punishment, he withdrew his internal energy and AhZi's sleeves hang down.

ZhaiXingZi's expression is meek, his body sway about, suddenly both his knees soften and he sat down on the ground. AhZi said: "Senior Martial Brother, how are you? Convinced of my ability?" ZhaiXingZi said softly: "I admit defeat. You....don't....don't call me senior martial brother, you are our senior martial sister!"

The crowd of disciples cheered: "Wonderful, wonderful! Senior martial sister's martial art is unrivalled, XingXiu Sect have such a head-disciple, our XingXiu Sect will be even more renowned under the heaven."

AhZi beamed and said to ZhaiXingZi: "The rules of our Sect, the head-disciple has changed, how should the previous head-disciple be taken care of?" Cold sweat rain down ZhaiXingZi's forehead, his voice trembled: "Senior...Senior Martial Sister, I beg you....beg you...." AhZi smile delicately and said: "I really want to spare you, but it's a pity, I cannot break the rules of our Sect. Please make a move!"

ZhaiXingZi knew his fate had been decided, he pleaded no longer, he gathered his energy to both his palms and pushed out towards the bonfire, but he exhausted his internal energy, the fire trembled faintly and remained motionless.

AhZi smiled and said: "Amusing, amusing, really amusing! Senior Martial Brother, where did your internal energy go?" She moved forward two steps and sent out both her palms, a stream of green flame spat out and shot

towards ZhaiXingZi. AhZi's internal energy was mediocre, this stream of green flame was slow and unhurried, it's also extremely loose and weak, but at this moment ZhaiXingZi did not have the slightest bit of power to resist, he did not even have energy to stand up and run away. The green flame landed on his body, in a split second his hair and clothes caught fire, amid his wretched cries his entire body was engulfed by the raging flames.

The crowd of disciples praised loudly, they praised senior martial sister's superb power and skill, she got rid of a scum that has plagued XingXiu Sect for many years, she followed revered Master's decree and rendered great service.

Although Xiao Feng have seen quite a few savage acts in the martial arts fraternity, but AhZi is a young, pretty, innocent and adorable maiden, inexplicably, she is capable of such sinister action. He felt an indescribable sense of loathing and disgust, he sighed softly and walked away.

AhZi shouted out: "Brother-in-law, Brother-in-law, don't go, wait for me." The disciples of XingXiu Sect saw someone suddenly appeared from behind the rock, the second and third disciple recognized the person as Xiao Feng, they turned pale in shock.

AhZi shouted again: "Brother-in-law, wait for me." She rushed towards Xiao Feng's side. At this moment, ZhaiXingZi's blood-curdling screech was getting louder and louder, his voice sharp and intense, adding the echoes from the ravine it's even more unpleasant. Xiao Feng frowned and said: "Follow me for what? You became the head-disciple of XingXiu Sect and became the senior martial sister of these group of people, aren't you contented?" AhZi smiled and said: "It won't do." She lowered her voice and continued: "This senior martial sister position is fake, why would I cherish it? Brother-in-law, let me follow you to YanMen Pass." Xiao Feng listened to ZhaiXingZi's wretched wail, he's unwilling to remain in this place any longer, he quickened his steps and headed northwards.

AhZi turned her head around and shouted out: "Second Martial Brother, I have some matters to attend to in the north. All of you stay nearby here and wait for me to return, nobody is allowed to leave without permission, do you understand?" The group of disciples rushed forward a few steps, they bowed respectfully and said: "We solemnly adhere to the decree of senior martial sister, disciples don't dare to disobey." Immediately after they praised in succession:

"We wish senior martial sister to have a pleasant journey."

"Senior martial sister will achieve victory in a single move."

"Senior martial sister possesses divine martial arts, is there anything she can't achieve in this world? Our best wishes is simply unnecessary."

AhZi dismissed them with a few wave of her hand, she cannot help but reveal a smiling expression on her face.

Xiao Feng gazed into the distance, the great stretch of land, mountain and river, a vast expanse of whiteness, in a distant place a mountain peak had yet to be covered by white snow, he felt a sense of desolation, he pondered: "This place, once I leave, I will never come back again." He took large strides, with a screeching noise, his movement on the snow is extremely fast. He saw AhZi doing her utmost to keep up, she wanted to travel side-by-side with him, under the reflection of the white snow, her pretty face is filled with innocence and lovely smiles, it's like receiving some new fascinating doll or some delicious candy, if he did not personally witness the scene just now, who would believe she could kill her own senior martial brother and obtain the title of head-disciple of the number one demonic sect under the heaven. Xiao Feng sighed softly, he felt everything is dull and tasteless in this mundane world.

AhZi asked: "Brother-in-law, many thanks for your help just now! Why did you sigh? I am too naughty?" Xiao Feng

said: "You are not naughty, you are simply too ruthless and frightening. Even for an adult man, this kind of act is unthinkable, you are just a young girl, you should not commit such merciless act." AhZi said in surprise: "Why ask a question when you already know the answer, or are you really not aware of it?" She inclined her head and looked at Xiao Feng, a curious expression written on her face. Xiao Feng said: "Aware of what?"

AhZi said: "This is really strange, how come you are not aware? My senior martial sister position is fake, you earn it for me, they simply can't discern the truth. If I don't kill him, eventually he will see through the guise, at that time you might not be at my side, I will surely die by his hands. Since I want to survive, I must kill him."

Xiao Feng said: "Fine! Then why are you so determined to follow me to YanMen Pass?" AhZi said: "Brother-in-law, let me be honest with you, ok? Will you hear me out?" Xiao Feng pondered: "Oh, so you have not been honest with me all this time, now you finally admit it." He said: "Good, I was afraid that you are not honest with me." AhZi chuckled a few times, she held onto his arm and said: "Are you afraid of me?" Xiao Feng sigh and said: "There are many things I am afraid of from you, afraid you might get into trouble, afraid you harm others casually, afraid you commit some weird stuff....." AhZi said: "Are you afraid that I might be bullied by others, or killed by others?" Xiao Feng said: "Your sister entrusted you to me, naturally I have to take care of you." AhZi said: "What if my sister did not entrust me to you? What if I am not AhZhu's sister?" Xiao Feng snorted and said: "Then why would I even bother about you?"

AhZi said: "My sister is really that good? In your heart you really don't have the slightest bit of regards for me?" Xiao Feng said: "I don't look down on you. But your sister is a thousand times better than you, AhZi, you simply can't be compared with her." As he said it, the rim of his eyes turned red, his voice rather sore.

AhZi pouted, she said angrily: "Since AhZhu is better than me in every aspect, then you ask her to accompany you, I won't accompany you anymore." She turned around and walked away.

Xiao Feng paid no heed to her, he continued moving forward, however he cannot help but feel sadness in his heart: "If AhZhu can accompany me and walk on this snow ground, if she suddenly get angry and walk away, naturally I will immediately chase after her and apologise to her nicely. No, I won't even make her angry in the first place, I will simply adhere to her wishes. Sigh, AhZhu is so yielding and considerate towards me, would she even get angry at me?"

Suddenly he heard the sound of footsteps, AhZi hurriedly ran back and said: "Brother-in-law you are really heartless, you really did not wait for me at all, you don't have the slightest bit of kindness." Xiao Feng smiled and said: "You can even talk about kindness. AhZi, who told you about the word 'kindness'?" AhZi said: "I heard it from mother, she said we should not be cruel and overbearing toward others, we must be kind and benevolent." Xiao Feng said: "Your mother is correct, it's a pity you were not by her side from childhood, you followed your Master and learnt a belly full of evil thoughts." AhZi smiled and said: "Fine! Brother-in-law, from now on I will follow you, I will learn something good from you."

Xiao Feng had a huge fright, he waved his hands repeatedly and said hurriedly: "Won't do, won't do! What good can you learn from a crude man like me? AhZi, just go! If you follow me, I will be distraught with anxiety, I can never calm down and think through things properly." AhZi said: "What kind of things you want to think about, why don't you tell me, I can help you think. Your character is too good, you will be easily tricked by others." Xiao Feng found it vexing yet funny, he said: "You are just a little girl, what do you know? Don't tell me you can understand things I don't know

about?" AhZi said: "Naturally, there are many things you will never be able to think of."

She grabbed a handful of snow from the ground and kneaded it into a ball, she tossed it out to a distant place and said: "What will you do when you go to YanMen Pass?" Xiao Feng shook his head and said: "Nothing. Hunting and shepherding throughout my entire life, that's all." AhZi said: "Who will cook for you? Who will make clothes for you?" Xiao Feng was stumped for words, he never thought of such matters before, he blurted out: "Eating and wearing clothes, isn't that easy? We Khitans eat mutton and beef, wear sheepskin and cowhide, everywhere is our home, we are flexible and adaptable, there is nothing to worry about." AhZi said: "When you are lonely, who will talk with you?" Xiao Feng said: "I will return to my own clan, naturally I will get to know friends from the same clan." AhZi said: "They will only talk about hunting, riding, slaughtering cow and sheep, how can it be interesting?"

Xiao Feng sighed, he knew her words are correct, he remained silent and did not reply.

AhZi said: "You definitely have to go to Liao Empire? Why don't you stay here, drink wine, get into fights, live or die, isn't that more enjoyable?"

When Xiao Feng heard her words, his chest warmed up, his heroic spirit soared, he lifted his head and gave a long whistle and said: "Your words are correct!"

AhZi pulled his arm and said: "Brother-in-law, then please don't leave, I also won't go back to XingXiu Sea anymore, I will follow you, drink wine and get into fights." Xiao Feng laughed and said: "You are the senior martial sister of XingXiu Sect, if they lose their head-disciple, lose their senior martial sister, then what will they do?" AhZi said: "This senior martial sister's position is fake, my life will end immediately once they uncover the truth, although it's fun but it's nothing amazing. It's more interesting to follow you and drink wine and get into fights." Xiao Feng gave a slight



smile and said: "Talking about drinking wine, your wine capacity is too weak, I am afraid you will be intoxicated just after one bowl of wine. Your fighting ability is also out of question, you won't be able to help me, instead I have to help you."

AhZi was depress, she locked her brows and paced around a few times, suddenly she sat down on the ground and burst into tears. Xiao Feng was frightened by her, he inquired hurriedly: "You....you...what are you doing?" AhZi ignored him, she cried loudly, it's really sorrowful.

Xiao Feng knew she always occupy the upper hand when dealing with others, even when captured by XingXiu Sect she was still stubborn and unyielding, he did not expect her to cry like a common girl, he cannot help but be at a loss and asked: "Hey, hey, AhZi, what happen?" AhZi sobbed and sniffled: "Go away, don't talk to me, let me cry to death here, only then you will be happy." Xiao Feng laughed and said: "You are perfectly fine, you won't die by crying." AhZi wept and said: "I must cry to death, I will cry to death and let you see!"

Xiao Feng laughed and said: "Slowly sit here and cry, I cannot accompany you anymore." He stretched his legs and moved away, he only move a few steps when her crying stopped suddenly, there was no sound at all. Xiao Feng was somewhat baffled, he turned around and saw her lie prostrate on the snow ground, she was motionless. Xiao Feng sniggered inwardly: "Little girl throwing a tantrum, there is no reason for me to bother about her." At once he left without a backward glance.

He moved for a few li, he turned his head and looked back again, the terrain was flat and vast, there were no trees or hill obstructing, AhZi was still lying on the ground motionless. Xiao Feng hesitated: "This girl's temper is extremely odd, maybe she will really lie down there and never get up again." He pondered: "I killed her elder sister, even if I disobey AhZhu's words, I won't take care of her or

protect her, but I cannot anger her to death.” As he thought about AhZhu, he cannot help but feel his chest warm up, at once he turned back and traveled with quick steps.

He rushed towards AhZi's side, she still laid prostrate on the ground, maintaining the exact same position as before, she did not move the slightest bit. Xiao Feng moved forward two steps, he was stumped for words, she was embedded inside the thick snow cover, amazingly, the snow surrounding her body did not melt at all, could it be that she really died? He was startled, he extended his hands and touched her cheek, her flesh was ice-cold, he checked her breath, she was not breathing. Xiao Feng saw her feign death before to deceive her parents, he knew her XingXiu Sect had a skill known as [Turtle Breath Skill], it can be used to shut off breathing, he did not panic, he extended his finger and touched the side of her torso twice, his internal energy penetrated through her acupoints.

AhZi cried out softly and opened her eyes slowly, suddenly she opened up her cherry lips and a shimmering blue needle shot out towards Xiao Feng's eyebrows.

Xiao Feng was separated from her by merely a few chi, he never expected her to launch such sneak attack, the poison needle was exceptionally swift and fierce, no matter how high his martial arts, it's impossible for him to evade it at such a hurried moment. He did not waste time thinking, he waved his right hand and generated an extremely thick and strong palm wind and chop back.

This palm contain his entire lifetime of internal energy, the steel needle arrived swiftly within a few chi, in order to use formless and shapeless palm wind to deflect the needle, the palm force must naturally be shockingly huge. As he slapped out his palm, he spared no effort and slanted his body to the right at the same time, he detected a faint fishy stench, the poison needle flew past the side of his cheek, the distance apart was merely an inch, the danger was simply beyond compare.

At the same time, AhZi's body was pushed away by his palm, she did not groan as her body flew horizontally, with a 'Pa' sound she landed around ten feet away. After landing, her body slid on the snow ground for another ten feet before coming to a stop.

## Chapter 26: Killing Bear and Beating Tiger Bare-handed

Fan translation by d4rksinz [Second Edition]

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Xiao Feng escaped danger by a hair breath, and he secretly cried out: "Shame!" The first thought that came to his mind was: "This evil vamp really has a vicious heart, she actually employed this sneaky trick against me." The hidden weapons from XingXiu Sect are extremely powerful and sinister to the extreme, if you got shot by their weapons, the chances of survival is minimal...and his heart shivered when he thought about it.

However, after seeing AhZi sent crashing over ten feet by his palm, he was in shock: "Oh no, how can she withstand my palm strike? I am afraid I killed her!" His body flashed and he was by her side, only to see her eyes closed, two stream of blood flowed from the corner of her lip. Her face was akin to gold paper, she stopped breathing for real this time!

Xiao Feng was stunned, he thought: "I killed her again, I killed AhZhu's sister. She...she implored me to take care of her sister on her deathbed, but ... but ... I killed her!" This shock should only have lasted for a moment, but he was in a trance-like state, and it seemed like an eternity to him. He shook his head, quickly placed his palm on AhZi's back, and desperately channeled his internal energy into her. After a while, AhZi moved slightly. Xiao Feng was overjoyed and exclaimed: "AhZi, AhZi, don't die. I will do whatever it takes to save you!"

But AhZi only ever moved so slightly, and she stopped moving again. Xiao Feng was extremely anxious, immediately he crossed his legs and sat on the snow, he lifted AhZi gently and placed her in front of him, pressing

both his palms on her vest, he slowly channeled his internal energy into her body. He knew that AhZi's injury was severe, at the moment he can only keep her breathing, and stop her from dying temporarily, and so the energy had to be channeled slowly. After some time, traces of white smoke emerged from his head, and he was exerting himself fully.

After continuously channeling his energy for half hour, AhZi's body moved slightly, she called out softly: "Brother-in-law!" Xiao Feng was overjoyed, but he continued to channel his energy and did not speak to her. Her body warmed up gradually, and her faint breathing could also be detected. Xiao Feng feared his effort might go to waste, and he did not stop his delivery of internal energy, only when it reaches noon, when AhZi was breathing uniformly again, did he carried her and trotted off quickly, however he found that her face did not have the slightest bit of color.

He opened up his step, moving fast yet stable, his left hand still pressing on AhZi's vest, as he continuously channeled his internal energy into her. After walking for a long time, he reached a small town, but there was no inn in the town. There was no choice since he could only travel farther north, after rushing for over twenty li, did he find a humble inn. This inn did not have a waiter and was managed solely by its owner. Xiao Feng asked the owner to fetch a bowl of hot soup, and using a spoon, he slowly fed it into AhZi's mouth. But she only drank three mouthfuls before vomiting everything out, the soup laced with her fresh blood.

Xiao Feng was extremely anxious, and he thought that AhZi's injury would most likely be incurable, the battle between Hades and Divine Physician Xue was unknown, even if he had Divine Physician Xue by his side right now, he might not be able to cure her. When AhZhu was injured by Shaolin Temple's Head Abbot, although he did not suffer the palm, the experience was no less thrilling, only by applying the mystical ointment from Taihang Mountain's Elder Tan,

and receiving treatment from the Divine Physician, was her life preserved. Although he knew that he could not hope to preserve AhZi's life, he refused to give in, and thought: "Even if I tire myself to the extreme, and deplete all my internal energy, I must preserve her life to the very end. I am not doing this for AhZi's sake, but to live up to AhZhu's exhortations."

He knew that AhZi plotted against him earlier, and if he did not retaliate with his palm, he would have died by her hands. He had extremely high martial arts, and in the event of danger, he will instinctively strike out to neutralize the danger. He was forced to wound AhZi, even if AhZhu was present, she will never utter the slightest bit of blame, as AhZi created this mess and there was nothing an outsider could do. Nevertheless, since AhZhu did not know about this, Xiao Feng could not help but feel that he let her down.

He did not sleep a wink that night, until the next day, he was continuously using his internal energy to sustain AhZi's life. The day AhZhu was wounded, Xiao Feng only sent out his energy when he felt her breath weaken. However, currently, his palm was inseparable from AhZi, else her breathing will cease immediately.

The second night was exactly the same situation. Although Xiao Feng had strong internal energy, but after two days and two nights of channeling, he was extremely tired. The two pot of wine stored in the inn had been emptied, and he wanted the owner to go out and buy more of it, but he did not carry much silvers with him. It did not matter if he did not eat for a day, however he will be depressed if he did not get to drink wine, he was getting physically and mentally exhausted, and he hoped to use the wine to perk up, he thought: "AhZi must have carried some money on her."

Untying her cloth bag, he saw three small gold ingots and a few broken silvers. He took a silver, tie up the cloth bag, and saw a purple ribbon connecting the bag to her waist.

Xiao Feng thought: "This little girl is very careful, she feared losing her cloth bag. However, with all these stuff connecting to her, it can be very uncomfortable." He reached out and untied the ribbon from her waist. The ribbon was well tied and requires one hand. With much effort, the ribbon was untied and upon tugging, he felt an object connected to the other end of the ribbon. However, the object was hidden in her skirt.

He let go of the ribbon, there was a "Pai" sound, and something fell out – it was a little yellow wooden tripod.

Xiao Feng sighed, bent over to pick it up and placed it on the table. The carvings on the wooden tripod were extremely meticulous, the wood quality was akin to polished jade, and red threads seemed to be ingrained into the wood texture. Xiao Feng knew this object was used to practice the "Great Energy Dissolving Skill" of the XingXiu Sect, he was disgusted and ignored the object after giving it two glances, he thought: "This little girl is really cunning, she kept saying that this Divine Wooden King Tripod had been handed to me, but she kept it hidden in her skirt. Firstly, she knew that her sect members would believe that I took it, secondly, it is not convenient to search her skirt, and eventually no one detected it. Sigh, she can hardly live right now, what is the use of such object?"

He summoned the inn owner, ordered him to take the silver to buy wine and meat, and continued to use his internal energy to keep AhZi alive.

By the morning of the fourth day, he really cannot take it anymore, gripping AhZi's palm with both hands, cradling her in his bosom, he channeled the energy through her palm, and after a while, he can no longer keep his eyes open and he finally drifted asleep. But he was constantly thinking about AhZi's life and death, and after a short nap, he snapped awake, fortunately while he fell asleep, his energy was flowing continuously into her, as long as their palm remain connected, her breathing will not stop.

This went on for another two days, although her breath can be maintained, her injuries did not have the slightest bit of improvement, and so they have to keep staying in this small inn, so how can this problem be resolved? AhZi occasionally opened her eyes, her gaze hazy and lifeless, an obvious sign that she was still unconscious, and naturally she was in no condition to speak. Xiao Feng thought hard but could not come up with any idea, he thought: "I can only carry her and continue travelling, try our luck along the way, I cannot stay in this inn and endure to no avail."

He hugged AhZi with his left hand, his right hand took her cloth bag and held it in his chest, seeing the wooden tripod on the table, he pondered: "Such a harmful object, it would be better to destroy it!" As he was about to strike with his palm, another thought came to him: "AhZi braved countless hardships to acquire this object. Seeing her injury is incurable. On her deathbed, I will take it out and let her glance at it, so that she may die in peace of mind, rather than having a gnawing regret till the end."

He reached out for the wooden tripod, once in his hand, he felt something squirmed and moved inside the tripod, feeling extremely curious, he examined the tripod, there were five coins-sized holes by the sides, the neck of the tripod had a fine slit, and it seemed to divide into two sections. Using his pinky and ring finger to grip the tripod's body, the thumb and middle finger to grip the upper section of the wood tripod and giving it a left turn, the section can be spun. After turning a few rounds, the tripod's cover opened, peering into the interior, he cannot help but be surprised, and somewhat nausea, there were two poisonous bugs gnawing at each other, one scorpion, and the other a centipede, the bugs were rolling around and dueling fiercely.

A few days ago, the tripod was placed on the table and there were no poisonous insects, naturally the centipede and scorpion came shortly after and climb into the tripod. Xiao Feng knew that this was XingXiu Sect's weird technique



in collecting poisonous bugs and creatures, tipping the tripod, the centipede and scorpion fell to the ground, he stepped on the bugs and killed them, replaced the lid on the tripod and kept it in the cloth bag. After settling his bills, he hugged AhZi, running against the wind and snow he travelled northward.

His feud with the heroes of Central Plains was deep, but he did not thought of disguising himself, as he travelled north, he got closer and closer to Song Dynasty capital of Kaifeng, it was inevitable that he would meet with martial artists from Central Plains, firstly he did not wish to kill them out of resentment, secondly he was carrying AhZi and it was not convenient to fight with them, thus he avoided the main road and chose desolate mountain routes. After travelling for a few hundred li, he was still safe and sound.

On this day, he reached a town, he saw a pharmacy with a wooden plaque "Generational Confucian Doctors Providing Treatment For Kings", he wondered: "There won't be any famous doctor in this small town, but there is no harm in seeking diagnosis." Thus, holding onto AhZi, he entered to seek medical treatment. That Confucian doctor took AhZi's pulse, glance at Xiao Feng, took AhZi's pulse again, glance at Xiao Feng again, the look on his face was strange, suddenly he stretched out a finger to take Xiao Feng pulse.

Xiao Feng was angered and said: "Doctor, the consultation is for my sister's illness, I am not seeking treatment" the doctor shook his head and said: "I think you may be sick, distraught and confused, you are in need of some medical treatment." Xiao Feng said: "I am distraught and confused?" The doctor replied: "The girl's pulse had stopped, she is dead, but the body had not yet gone stiff. You are seeking what kind of treatment for her? Aren't you distraught and confused? Buddy, the dead cannot be revived, you cannot be too sad, take your sister's body and quickly bury her, let her rest peacefully."

Xiao Feng did not know whether to laugh or cry, but the doctor's words were not completely unreasonable, AhZi was indeed dead, but she was totally reliant on his internal energy to maintain her chance of survival, how would a normal doctor understand this? He stood up and turned towards the door.

A housekeeper hurriedly tripped into the pharmacy and shouted: "Quick, quick, I want the best old mountain ginseng. Our venerable master suddenly suffered a stroke, he's on his last breath; he needs the ginseng to hang on to his life." The pharmacy shopkeeper said: "Yes, Yes! We have the best old mountain ginseng."

Xiao Feng listened to the words "Old mountain ginseng, hang onto life" at once he remembered, as a person was on his last breath, if you feed him a few mouthfuls of ginseng broth, he will be able to hang on and live for a few more moments, long enough for him to say his last words, but he did not know he could also use it on AhZi. The owner took out a red wooden box, carefully pushing open the cover, revealing three finger-thick ginsengs. Xiao Feng heard people say, the thicker the ginseng the better; the deeper the wrinkle on the skin, the more valuable, if it is shaped like a person, head, hand and foot all intact, then it's of the highest quality that come once in a blue moon. The three ginseng seemed to be common object, not something remarkable. The housekeeper plucked one of them and hurried away quickly.

Xiao Feng took out one gold ingot and bought the remaining two ginsengs. The pharmacy has utensils for brewing medicine; the ginseng broth was brewed immediately, and slowly fed to AhZi. This time around, she did not vomit. After feeding a few more mouthfuls, Xiao Feng noticed her pulse strengthen slightly, and her breathing seemed a little smoother, and he could not help but feel delighted.

That Confucian doctor was watching at the sides, but shook his head repeatedly and said: "Buddy, this ginseng was not acquired easily; it's a pity that it is wasted. The ginseng is not a fungus of immortality; if it can revive the dead, then rich people will never die!"

For the past few days Xiao Feng could not leave AhZi for the slightest moment, he was bored and vexed, hearing the endless nagging from the doctor, the cold snide remarks, he could not help but feel his anger rising, he wanted to strike out with his palm, but as his arm moved slightly, he immediately restrained himself: "Randomly attacking a person without martial arts, can one be considered an honorable hero?" He promptly stayed his hand, picked up AhZi and rushed out of the pharmacy, he heard the doctor still sneering: "This guy is really confused, running around with a dead person, it seems that he will not live for long!" This doctor did not know that he had just came back from the gates of hell, if Xiao Feng had struck out in his fit of rage, even if ten imperial doctor was around, they will not be able to save him.

Once out of the pharmacy, Xiao Feng wondered: "There's a saying that old mountain ginseng is produced in the Changbai Mountains along the bitter cold of the land, I should try my luck there. Although to revive AhZi is an extremely difficult task, but as long as I can make her live for an extra day, AhZhu's spirit will be gratified."

Turning to the right, he headed on the north-east path. As he encountered pharmacy along the way, he went in to buy the ginseng, and when he ran out of gold and silver, he just strode in and grab the ginseng, how could a few pharmacies' attendants hope to stop him? After consuming large amount of ginseng, AhZi could occasionally opened her eyes, and gently cried out: "Brother-in-law!" During the night, even if he did not transmit his internal energy into her for a few hours, she could still carry on breathing on her own.

As the weather gradually grew cold, Xiao Feng holding on to AhZi, finally reached the Changbai Mountain, although the Changbai Mountain produces considerable amount of ginseng, but if one is not familiar with the terrain and the ginseng harvesting art, even if they search for years, they might not find even one ginseng. As Xiao Feng continued travelling north, travellers gradually thinned out, eventually, all he could see was forest and tall grass, snow piled high as slope; he did not see a single soul around for a few days. He could not help but secretly cry out: "Oh no! Oh no! There is snow everywhere, but how to dig the ginseng? I should return to places where ginseng is sold, if I have money I will buy it, else I will just rob." So, holding on to AhZi, he started trekking back again.

At that time the weather was freezing, and snow accumulated several feet off the ground, it was extremely difficult to travel, if not for his unsurpassed martial arts, as one travels while carrying another person, even if they don't freeze to death, they will get trapped in the snow and be unable to free themselves.

During the third day, the sky became gloomy, and it seems that a blizzard will strike soon, as he observed the surroundings, he was surrounded by white snow, not to mention that there was no sign of footprint, there was also no sign of footprints of wild beast. Xiao Feng was at a loss, it was as if he was surrounded by boundless sea. The sound of wind was sharp, and it came whistling in his ears.

Xiao Feng knew he was lost, he leap several times up the trees and look around, his surrounding was full of snow covered forest, how can he determine his bearings? Afraid that AhZi might catch a cold; he undid his robe and wrapped her in his bosom. Although he had never been afraid of anything, but in this vast surroundings, it seemed that he was the only one left in the world and he cannot help but feel frightened. Even if he was the only one left in this world it would not bother him, the world maybe vast but it cannot

trap him, however in his arm he was carrying an unconscious, half-dead AhZi!

He did not eat for three consecutive days now, and he wanted to hunt a chicken or wild hare, but he could not see the slightest shadow around, he wondered: "I can't escape by rushing around randomly, I should rest a night in the forest, once the storm settle, the moon and stars will be visible and I will be able to identify the correct direction." He found a shelter in the forest, gathered some dried branches, and set a fire. As the fire burned brightly, he felt the warmth in his body. His belly growled from hunger, seeing some fungus growing on the roots of a tree, gray colored and seemingly non-toxic, he baked them over the fire and ate it to alleviate his hunger.

After eating over twenty fungus, he felt more energetic, he supported AhZi on his bosom to warm her with the fire, as he was about to close his eyes and fall asleep, he heard a fierce and loud hooting shout, but it was actually the roar of a tiger. Xiao Feng was overjoyed: "A large worm has arrived at the doorstep; we can eat tiger meat now!" He strained his ear and heard two tigers dashing on the snow covered ground, but he immediately heard someone calling out, it seemed that someone was chasing the tigers.

After hearing the shouts of people, he was overjoyed, he heard the two tigers dashing westward, immediately he laid AhZi gently by the fire, using his lightness martial arts, he pursued them on the slanting road. Currently it was snowing heavily, the northern wind blows strongly, churning and filling the sky with snow.

After rushing over ten li, he saw two brightly-colored tigers came roaring, followed closely by a large man wearing a beast-hide and carrying a large iron fork. The two tigers were huge, after running for a while, one of the tiger turned around, roared and rushed towards the hunter. That man readied his tiger-hunting-fork, aimed and attacked the tiger's throat. The tiger's movement was nimble, with a blink

of an eye, it avoided the fork, and the second tiger also sprang towards the hunter.

The hunter's reaction was extremely fast; he reversed the fork and with a "Pai" sound, hit the tiger's waist with the fork's handle. The tiger roar out in pain, hanging out its tail, it turned around and ran. The other tiger did not want to fight anymore and followed suit. Xiao Feng saw the hunter was vigorous and skillful, had strong muscular strength, but it seemed that he did not know any martial arts, only that he was familiar with the habits of wild animal, when the tiger was about to attack, he directed the fork at the tiger's vital spot, anticipating the movement of the enemy, but it will not be easy to kill two tigers with that one stroke.

Xiao Feng shouted: "Brother, I will help you hunt the tiger." He rushed out and blocked the path of the two tigers. Seeing Xiao Feng rushed out suddenly, the hunter was shocked, he cheered and shouted loudly, but he was not speaking the language of Han people. Xiao Feng did not understand what he was saying, and he ignored it for the moment, he lifted his right hand, aimed and struck the forehead of the first tiger, with a "Bang" sound, the tiger somersaulted and fell down, and with a thundering roar, it pounced towards Xiao Feng again.

Xiao Feng used seventy percent of his power in that previous palm strike, even for outstanding martial artists, their brain will burst immediately if they received that strike, but the tiger's head was strong and its bones were thick, this once in a century rock-shattering palm strike only made the tiger somersault when struck on the head, and it even recovered and pounced back immediately. Xiao Feng praised: "Good chap, hats off to you!" he turned sideways, his right hand slanting from top-to-bottom, and with a "Ca" sound, he chopped towards the tiger's waist. With this chop, he added another ten percent of his power, as the tiger rushed forward a few steps, its footsteps faltered, it knew that it might die and tried to flee desperately. Xiao Feng

moved forward two steps, with a hold from his right hand, he caught the tiger's tail, with a loud shout, his left hand also gripped the tiger's tail, and with his best effort, he strained both his hands and pulled back, the tiger was spontaneously rushing forward, but because of this pull, the two forces collide and the tiger flew into mid-air.

The hunter armed with his fork, was currently fighting fiercely with the second tiger, suddenly seeing Xiao Feng fling the tiger into mid-air, he was shocked to the extreme. The tiger opened its big mouth in mid-air, stretched out its claws, and descended. Xiao Feng gave a grunt, and pushed out with both his palm, there was a muffled bang, as it landed on the tiger's belly. The tiger's belly is its soft spot, and this move "Twin Palm Parting Cloud" is one of Xiao Feng's proudest move, the tiger's five internal organs was shattered, after rolling around for a while, it fell down on the snow and died.

The hunter admired Xiao Feng from the bottom of his heart, killing a tiger empty handed, he has an iron fork, if he can't even kill the tiger he is fighting, won't he be underestimated? Immediately he jabbed his fork left, jabbed his fork right, and rained jab after jab on the tiger's body. The tiger suffered numerous jabs, and became even more enraged, revealing a dense row of white teeth, it pounced towards the hunter.

The hunter dodged sideways, thrusting his iron fork, and with a "Pu" sound, buried it into the tiger's forehead, lifting up with both hands, the tiger gave a miserable howl and collapsed onto the ground. Exerting his strength in both arms, the hunter firmly nailed the tiger onto the snow covered ground. But a "Ke-La-La" sound was heard, the back of his upper body clothing split, exposing his bare back, the muscles were well-built, and he looked very imposing. Xiao Feng saw him and secretly praised: "Good man!" The tiger's belly was facing the sky, its four paws scratching and

clawing randomly, after a while, it stopped moving altogether.

The hunter raised his fork, laughed, turned around, gave Xiao Feng the thumbs-up, and said a few words. Xiao Feng did not understand his words, but judging from his expression, he knew that the hunter was praising him as an amazing hero, and so he copied the hunter, giving two thumbs-up, he said: "Hero! Hero!"

The man was overjoyed, pointing to his nose tip, he said: "WanYan AguDa!" Xiao Feng knew this was his name and thus he also pointed to the tip of his nose and said: "Xiao Feng!" The man replied: "Xiao Feng? Khitan?" Xiao Feng nodded, and said: "Khitan! You?" he stretches out his finger in inquiry. The man replied: "WanYan AguDa! Jurchen!"

Xiao Feng knew that to the east of Liao Empire, north of Korea, there is a tribe called the Jurchen, the tribe was brave and skillful in battle, and so WanYan AguDa came from this Jurchen tribe. Although language was a barrier, but to meet a companion in this vast snow sea, Xiao Feng was naturally happy, he started gesturing, signaling that he has another companion, lifting the dead tiger, he walked to where AhZi was lying. Dragging his dead tiger, AguDa followed suit.

The tiger just died and its blood has not yet coagulated, Xiao Feng put down the tiger, cut open its throat, and poured the tiger's blood into AhZi's mouth. AhZi opened her mouth and was able to swallow the tiger's blood, only after drinking around ten mouthfuls did she stop. Xiao Feng was extremely happy, he tore off two sets of tiger's leg, and started roasting them over the fire. AguDa saw him bare-handedly tearing off the tiger's body, as if he was tearing a cooked chicken, such hand-strength has never been seen before, and was completely unheard of, he stared at Xiao Feng's hands blankly, and after a while, he stretched out his palm to gently stroke Xiao Feng's wrist and arm, his face filled with upmost admiration.



After the tiger meat was grilled, Xiao Feng and AguDa ate their fill. AguDa gestured and asked about his intentions, Xiao Feng gestured that he's digging ginseng for AhZi's medical treatment, and he eventually got lost. AguDa laughed, and with a burst of gestures, said that ginseng was easy to acquire, as long as Xiao Feng follow him, he can have any amount of ginseng. Xiao Feng was overjoyed, stood up, picked up AhZi with his left hand, and his right hand held up the dead tiger. AguDa gave a thumb-up and praised: "Great strength!"

AguDa know this area and was very familiar with the terrain, he will not get lost even in this heavy blizzard. They walked for two days, in the afternoon of the third day; Xiao Feng saw many footprints in the snow. AguDa gestured in succession, saying that they are nearing the tribe. Sure enough, after crossing two hill-depressions, he saw a dense mass of skin tents on the slope of the south-east mountain. AguDa whistled with his mouth, and someone came out of the tent to welcome him.

As Xiao Feng approached with AguDa, he saw a campfire at the front of every tent unit, the campfire was surrounded by women, they were mending beast skins and pickling beast meat. AguDa led Xiao Feng to the largest tent in the middle; he raised the curtain and entered. Xiao Feng followed. The tent had more than ten people sitting around, drinking merrily, upon seeing AguDa, the crowd cheered. AguDa, pointing to Xiao Feng, gestured and narrated, Xiao Feng watched his expression and knew that he was narrating how he killed a tiger empty-handed. The crowd gathered around Xiao Feng, gave thumb-ups, and praise him.

As the atmosphere was getting rowdy, a Han salesman selling cosmetics walked over, and said to Xiao Feng: "Sir, do you know Han language?"

Xiao Feng happily replied: "I know. I know."

Asking about the situation, he found out that this was the tent of the Jurchen's chief. The black-bearded old man in the middle of the crowd is the tribe's chief HeLiBu. He has eleven sons; all of them are competent heroes. AguDa is his second son. This Han salesman was called Xu Zhuocheng, and he comes here every winter to stock up on ginsengs, beast furs, and he only leaves during the beginning of spring. Xu Zhuocheng knew the language of the Jurchen, and he became Xiao Feng's interpreter. The Jurchen and Khitan are at war with each other, but they always admired good heroes. WanYan AguDa was intelligent and skillful, and he has the adoration of his father and fellow tribesmen, and he kept on praising Xiao Feng endlessly, thus the tribesmen did not bear any grudge against Xiao Feng although he is a Khitan, and they treated Xiao Feng as an honored guest.

AguDa gave up his own tent for Xiao Feng and AhZi. Xiao Feng tried to decline his good intentions, but AguDa insisted, seeing his sincerity Xiao Feng eventually accepted and lived in the tent. The Jurchen tribe held a large feast to welcome Xiao Feng, the meat of the two tigers also became the delicacy of the feast. Xiao Feng did not drink wine for over half a month now, as numerous bags of Jurchen's wine were taken out, Xiao Feng drank bags after bags of wine, and he was totally unrestrained. The Jurchen's wine was spicy, the taste was extremely strong, the alcohol content was fierce, ordinary people will be drunk by drinking half a bag, Xiao Feng drank well over ten bags, and his complexion did not change at all. The Jurchen tribe measures a true hero by his wine tolerance, the crowd did not see with their own eyes how Xiao Feng killed a tiger bare-handed, but such drinking prowess, even ten Jurchen warriors cannot hope to compare, naturally everyone was in awe.

Xu Zhuocheng saw that Xiao Feng was well-respected, and he was flattering towards him. Xiao Feng had nothing to do while staying in the tent, thus he followed AguDa and went hunting during the day, at night, he followed Xu

Zhuocheng and learned Jurchen's language. When he learnt forty to fifty of the language, he thought: He is a Khitan but he cannot speak Khitan's language and this seemed unreasonable, and thus he also learned Khitan's language. Xu Zhuocheng had travelled around the world, be it Khitan, Western Xia, or Jurchen, he can speak their language fluently. Xiao Feng was not gifted in learning language, but Jurchen and Khitan language were similar and easily comparable, after a long period of time, he could convey his intention correctly, and no longer require an interpreter.

After a few months, spring came, AhZi consumed ginseng every day, and her injury had some significant improvement. The ginsengs dug out by the Jurchen tribesmen were rare and of the highest quality, they were even more valuable than real gold. Every time Xiao Feng went hunting, he will be able to hunt a lot of wild animals, and harvest some ginseng for AhZi to eat. Even for wealthy family, if their young miss eat ginseng every day, the family will most probably go broke. Every day, Xiao Feng will still use his internal energy to help regulate her breathing, however he only have to do it once or twice - a huge improvement from previous situation where his palm was inseparable from her body. Sometimes, with much effort, AhZi can speak a few words, however her four limbs were still weak and she was unable to move, all her daily needs and necessities were taken care of by Xiao Feng. Mindful of AhZhu's devotion, Xiao Feng willingly commit to these tasks, the more he tend to AhZi, the more he feel that he fulfilled AhZhu's wish, and he felt gratified from the bottom of his heart.

On this day, AguDa led a dozen tribesmen to the North Mountains to hunt bears, and he invited Xiao Feng to accompany him, he said: "The bear has thick fur, lots of grease, its paw delicious, and the bear's gall is extremely effective in treating injuries." Xiao Feng saw that AhZi was in much better shape, and so he could go hunting without

worries, and he gladly joined the hunting party. Before the sun had risen, the party headed off towards north.

Actually, it was early summer now, the snow had melted, the ground was muddy and the forest was filled with rotten branches and leaves, it's extremely hard to travel, but the Jurchens were nimble, and could still travel fast. Till noon, an old hunter called out: "Bear! Bear!" Everybody looked to the direction he was pointing, there was a big footprint in the distant muddy ground, not far from the footprint was the bear foot track. Everyone was excited, and they followed the foot track and started chasing.

The bear footprint was several inches deep in the mud, even a child could track it easily; everyone was cheering loudly and moved forward quickly.

The footprints went all the way west and eventually left the muddy forest, to a grass plain, the crowd moved even faster on the plain.

As they were dashing forward, they suddenly heard the sound of horns, dirt was rising at the front, and a large troop of people were galloping over. They saw a big black bear turn and ran, eighty to seventy people on high horses were chasing behind, cheering, and some of them were armed with spears, while some others had bow and arrow, their expressions brave and fierce.

AguDa cried out: "Khitan people! They have more men, retreat! Retreat!" Xiao Feng knew that it was his own tribesmen, and he had an intimate feeling in his heart, seeing AguDa running away, he did not move at all, stood there and tried to observe the situation.

The Khitan people cried out: "Jurchen barbarians! Shoot them! Shoot them!" There was a "SouSou" sound and endless arrows were shot towards them.

Xiao Feng was annoyed: "Why did they shoot for no reason upon meeting each other, they don't even try to clarify the situation." He reach out his hand and pluck the few arrows that was shot towards him. But an "Ah" sound

was heard, the old Jurchen hunter scream as he was shot in the back, he collapsed and died.

AguDa rallied his men to a slope, proning on the ground, drawing their bow and arrows, they shot down two Khitans. Meanwhile, Xiao Feng did not know which side he should help.

The arrows shot by the Khitans were all smack down by him, and they shouted: "What?" They did not say anything more and started killing people! AguDa shouted from the slope: "Xiao Feng, Xiao Feng, come here they do not know you are a Khitan!"

At this moment, two Khitan armed with long spears, were riding horses and charging towards Xiao Feng, the two spears were raised and thrust towards his left and right.

Xiao Feng did not wish to harm his own tribesmen, he seized the spears with each of his hands and with a gentle flick, the two Khitan dismounted from their horses. Xiao Feng lifted both men with the spear's shaft and tossed them. The two men gave an "Ah Ah" cry in mid-air, they flew back to their original position, fell down on the ground and took quite a while before climbing back up again. AguDa and the Jurchen tribesmen applauded loudly.

Among the Khitan troop, a red robed middle-aged man cried out loudly, giving commands. Several dozen Khitans spread out into two wings, and they came flanking, cutting off AguDa's escape route. The red robed man was still surrounded by ten people.

AguDa saw that the situation was disadvantageous, with a loud roar, he signaled his tribesmen and Xiao Feng to escape. The Khitans were raining arrows at them and they shot down a few more Jurchen tribesmen. With their bow and crossbow, the Jurchen hunter also shot down ten Khitan riders instantly, but they were too heavily outnumbered and could only shoot and run.

Xiao Feng saw that the Khitans were unreasonable, although it was his own people, he cannot care for them at

this moment, he grabbed a bow, and “Sou Sou Sou Sou”, fired four arrows in succession, each of the arrows hit the Khitan on their shoulder or their foot, four Khitan fell off their horses, but no one died.

The red robed man gave a few cry, and the Khitans came charging with the horses, valiant and strong to the extreme.

Xiao Feng saw that from the original hunting party, only AguDa and five youth survived, they are still running and shooting, the rest of the tribesmen have been shot dead by the Khitans.

There was nowhere to hide in this great grass plain, if the fighting continues, even AguDa will be killed. During all these times, the Jurchen treated him like a distinguished guest, if he can't protect his friends in times of danger, how can he still be considered an honorable hero?

If he go on a killing spree, he could slaughter the Khitan until they decide to retreat, however he would be killing countless people from his own tribe, only by capturing the red robed man, forcing him to issue an order to retreat, can he prevent both sides from killing each other.

His mind was set, he shouted in Khitan language: “Hey, you better retreat! I am not going to hold back if you don't pull back your troops.” “Hu Hu Hu” sound was heard, and three spears were thrown towards Xiao Feng. Xiao Feng thought: “You people really don't know what is good for you!”

Lowering his body, he sprinted towards the red robed man. AguDa saw him taking the risk, and cried: “It's useless, Xiao Feng come back quickly!”

Xiao Feng ignored him, he summoned his vigor and burst forth quickly. The Khitans cried out, sending their spears and arrows to greet him. Xiao Feng caught a spear, split it into two, taking half a spear and using it as a long sword, he pushed aside all the weapons thrown at him, his step was akin to flying and he was right next to the red robed man.

The red robed man had a beard, his expression powerful, seeing Xiao Feng arrived, he was not frightened at all, he got three javelins from his left and right guard, with a "Sou" sound a javelin was thrown at Xiao Feng. Xiao Feng reached out and caught the first javelin, anticipating the second javelin, he caught it again. Both his arms vibrated, and the two javelins surged and shot out, the left and right guard of the red robed man was shot down from their horses. The red robed man shouted: "Good skills!" The third javelin was already thrown. Xiao Feng extended his left palm, wheeling the spear head, he re-directed the javelin and shot it back like the wind, plunging it into the chest of the red robed man's horse.

The red robed man called out "Ah Yo!" and jumped off the horse back. Xiao Feng flicked his body, stretched out his left arm, and seized the man's right shoulder. He heard the sharp wind of a golden blade behind his back, with a single step, he shot forward a few feet, two "Tuo Tuo" sound was heard, and two spears pierced into the ground. Xiao Feng held onto the red robed man and leaped to the left, reaching the back of a Khitan rider, he knocked the rider off the horseback with a single palm, mounted the horse and sped away.

The red robed man waved his fist and tried to punch Xiao Feng's face. Xiao Feng held him under his left arm and the man could not move anymore. Xiao Feng shouted: "Ask your men to retreat, else I will crush you to death immediately." The red robed man was helpless, and he can only cry out: "Everyone retreat, stop fighting."

The Khitan surrounded Xiao Feng, wanting to save the man. Xiao Feng used the broken spear and held it against the red robed man's right cheek, and shouted: "Do you want me to kill him?"

An old Khitan warrior shouted: "Quickly release our leader, else we will dismember you by five horses."

Xiao Feng laughed, making a “Hu” sound with his palm, he split the air in front of the old Khitan. He intended to use this palm to display his power and intimidate the crowd, so as to avoid unnecessary killing, thus he used full strength from his hand, however he heard a very loud bang, the old Khitan was caught by the palm force, he flew off his horse and fell several feet away, fresh blood spurting from him mouth, it seems he will not survive.

The Khitan have never seen such display of air-splitting palm skill, the palm force came out of nowhere, it's akin to witchcraft, the Khitan simultaneously reined in their horses and backed-off, their expression unusually terrified, fearing that Xiao Feng might strike at them with his palm.

Xiao Feng shouted: “If you still don't retreat, I'll kill him with a single palm!” and he raises his palm, mimicking as if he was about to strike the head of the red robed man.

The red robed man cried: “You lot back away, everyone move back!” Everyone took their horses and move back, but they still refuse to leave.

Xiao Feng wondered: “This area is all flatland and wilderness, if I release their leader, these Khitan will chase with their horses and we will not be able to escape successfully.” He said to the red robed man: “You call them to send eight horses over.” The red robed man complied and conveyed the order. The Khitan pulled eight horses and hand them over to AguDa.

AguDa hate these Khitan for killing his companions and he punched them, “Bang”, he flipped one of the Khitan riders off his horse. Although the Khitan have more people, they did not retaliate. Xiao Feng said: “You set another order, ask your men to kill the horses they are mounting, they cannot keep even one horse.”

The red robed man was straightforward, he did not bicker and argue, he ordered loudly: “Everyone dismount, kill the horses.” The men did not hesitate, they dismounted and using their sword or spear, killed all the horses.



Xiao Feng did not expect the men to be so compliant, he secretly admired them, thinking: "It seems this red robed man is really high ranking, any words coming from him, his troops did not even show any intention to disobey. The Khitan's military is so firm, no wonder when they fought with the Song, they have more victories than defeats." He said: "Ask your men to return, they are not allowed to pursue. If one of them pursue, I'll cut off one of your hand; If two people pursue, I'll cut off both your hands; If four people pursue, I'll cut off your four limbs! "

The red robed man was so furious that his beard flared, but as he was the hostage, there was nothing he could do, he could only order: "Everyone go back, gather our men and horses, and destroy the Jurchen nests!" All the warrior said in unison: "Yes, sir! " and they bowed together.

Xiao Feng reined in the horse, waited for AguDa and the five men to mount their horses, and they sped off east and retraced their previous route. After riding for countless li, Xiao Feng saw that the Khitan really did not pursue, he jumped to another mount and let the red robed man ride on a horse by himself.

The eight of them rode non-stop until they reached their big camp. AguDa reported to his father HeLiBu on how they met the enemy, how they got rescued by Xiao Feng, and how they captured the Khitan's leader. HeLiBu said happily: "Well done, bring forward that Khitan dog."

The red robed man entered the tent, his expression still mighty and powerful, upright and unyielding. HeLiBu knew that he was a Khitan noble and asked: "What is your name? What is your position in Liao Kingdom?" The man proudly said: "I am not captured by you, are you fit to ask me?" Khitan and Jurchen have the same practice, the enemy will be enslaved to his captor. HeLiBu laughed and said: "Well said!"

The red robed man walk towards Xiao Feng, bending his right knee he knelt down, prostrate before him and said:

“Master, you really are an amazing hero, I cannot defeat you, even though I have more men, I still lost. Being captured by you, I have no complaints. If you let me go back, I will offer you fifty liang gold, five hundred liang silver and thirty gallant horses.”

AguDa's uncle PoLaSu said: “You are a Khitan noble, this kind of ransom is insufficient, Brother Xiao Feng, you ask him to send five hundred liang gold, five thousand liang silver and three hundred gallant horses to redeem himself.” This PoLaSu was intelligent and capable, he increased the original ransom tenfold, it's clear he was making an outrageous demand. Based on Jurchen crude lifestyle, the original ransom of fifty liang gold, five hundred liang silver and thirty gallant horse was already a huge wealth, the Jurchen and Khitan fought for decades, and they have never heard of such high ransom, if this red robed man refuse to increase the ransom, then they will just accept the original amount which is already considered a large fortune.

Surprisingly, the red robed man did not hesitate, he promised: “Fine, so be it!”

One of the store keepers got a huge shock, he could hardly believe his ears. Khitan and Jurchen, there will of course be tribesmen who lie and deceive others, but for business transaction or when making a vow, one will always honor his words, they will never take it back, moreover this is a ransom, if the Khitan did not have sufficient money, or he regretted his words, this red robed man will not be able to return to his tribe, thus empty promises were totally ineffective. PoLaSu was afraid that after being captured he got shocked to the extreme and was in a confuse state, he said: “Hello, did you listen clearly? I am talking about five hundred liang gold, five thousand liang silver and three hundred gallant horses?”

The red robed man had an air of arrogance, and he coldly said: “Five hundred liang gold, five thousand liang silver and three hundred gallant horse, how is this significant? My

great Liao Kingdom is wealthier than the rest of the world, this meagre sum means nothing in our eyes. "He turned to Xiao Feng, his expression became respectful and said: "Master, I will only listen to your bidding, I will no longer care about the words of others." PoLaSu said: "Brother Xiao Feng, you ask him, what is his official position in Liao Kingdom?" Before Xiao Feng could ask, the person replied: "Master, if you are determined to ask my origin, I will fabricate something to cheat you, you will not be able to separate the truth from the lies. However, you are an honorable hero, I am also an honorable hero, I do not want to lie to you, and thus you need not ask anymore."

Xiao Feng reversed his left hand, took out the blade from his waist, his right palm strike the back of the blade, with a "Pai" sound, one section of the blade immediately bent down, he shouted in a stern voice: "You dare not say? If I strike my palm on the back of your head, what do you think will happen?"

The red robed man did not panic, he gave a thumb-up with his right hand and said: "Good skills, good martial art! Today I really saw the number one hero in this world, this is worthwhile. Hero Xiao Feng, it's impossible to coerce me against my will with your physical strength. Just kill me if you wish. Although the Khitan cannot beat you, but our moral integrity is no less sturdy than yours."

Xiao Feng laughed, and said: "Good, Good! I will not kill you here. If I killed you with one chop of my blade, you will not be convinced, let's go far far away, we will battle each other again."

HeLiBu and PoLaSu chorus: "Brother Xiao Feng, it's a pity to kill this man, it's better to keep him and collect the ransom. If you are angry, we can beat him severely with a stick or whip."

Xiao Feng said: "No! He wants to pretend to be a brave man, I won't allow him to pretend." He borrowed two spears and two bows from the Jurchen, took the red robed man by

the wrist, walk out of the tent, mounted a horse and said: "Mount the horse!" The red robed man did not cower, he have no doubt that he will die during their battle, Xiao Feng said that he wants to duel him again, but it's akin to a cat which caught a rat, it just want to tease the rat one last time before killing, however he was not frightened, he mounted a horse and rode north.

Xiao Feng followed on his horse, both of them rode for a few li. Xiao Feng said: "Turn and travel westward!" The red robed man replied: "The scenery here is extremely beautiful, I choose to die here." Xiao Feng said: "Catch!" as he threw the spear and bow over. The man caught it, and shouted loudly: "Hero Xiao Feng, I know I am not your match, but the Khitan people rather die than surrender! I will attack now!" Xiao Feng said: "Wait, catch!" He threw his own spear and bow over, being empty-handed, he gave a smile. The red robed man was furious and shouted: "You are fighting me with your bare hands, aren't you insulting me a bit too much!"

Xiao Feng shook his head and said: "No! In his life, Xiao Feng respect heroes, value brave men. Although your martial art is inferior to mine, you are a brave hero, Xiao Feng will befriend you! You can return to your tribe now."

The red robed man got a huge shock and asked: "What ... what?" Xiao Feng smiled slightly: "I said Xiao Feng will treat you like a good friend, I will let you return home safely!" The red robed man just returned from the gates of hell, naturally he was overjoyed and asked: "You will really release me? ... You ... what is your intention? When I return home, I will multiple the ransom tenfold again and deliver it to you." Xiao Feng was angered and said: "I treat you as a friend, why are you not treating me as a friend? Xiao Feng is a dignified man, why would I hanker after material wealth? "

The red robed man said: "Yes, yes!" He threw down the weaponry, dismounted, fell to his knees, head bowed and worshipped: "Expressing my gratitude towards benefactor

for sparing my life.” Xiao Feng knelt down and returned the salute: “Xiao Feng never kills a friend, and he will not accept worship from a friend. If he is a slave, after receiving his worship, Xiao Feng will not spare his life.” The red robed man was even more excited, stood up and said: “Hero Xiao, you claim that you treat me as a friend, but I want to be your sworn brother, what say you?”

After becoming an accomplished martial artist, Xiao Feng joined the Beggar clan immediately. Seniority and rankings was observed strictly, after the clan-leader and vice-clan-leader, there were the martial-art imparting elder, rule enforcement elder, four protector elders, various incense-chief, eight-pouch disciples, seven-pouch disciples, and other disciples in descending order. He can only accumulate his clan contributions, he did not have anyone to swear brotherhood with, only in Wuxi where he competed wine drinking with Duan Yu and due to mutual admiration, did he finally sworn brotherhood. As he listened to the red robed man, he recalled that he was formerly associated with heroes all over Central Plains, till now where he did not even have a proper place to live, he really became down-and-out, he cannot help but sigh, but as he saw the heroic aura of this red robed man, who can also be considered a good brave man, he replied: “Very good, very good, Xiao Feng is thirty one years old this year. Respected brother, how old are you?” The man laughed: “I am called YeLu Ji. Benefactor, I am older than you by thirteen years.” Xiao Feng said: “Elder Brother, how can you address your little brother as benefactor? You are the elder brother, please accept my respect.” As he said this, he paid his respect. YeLu Ji quickly returned the courtesy.

Both of them inserted three arrows into the ground, lit the arrow tail feathers to represent incense, worship eight times to heaven, and they became sworn brothers.

Yelu Ji was extremely happy and said: “Brother, your surname is Xiao, it may be similar to our Khitan people.”

Xiao Feng said: "I will not hide the truth from elder brother, little brother is a Khitan." As he said this, he undid his robes, revealing the green wolf-head tattoo on his chest.

Yelu Ji saw it and rejoiced: "Really good, you descended from the previous generation of our Khitan tribe. Brother, the Jurchen land is cold and harsh, why don't you follow me and return to our capital, we will enjoy the riches together." Xiao Feng said: "I thank Elder Brother's good intentions, but younger brother has always been poor and lowly, the rich life does not suit me. Little brother is currently residing with the Jurchen, hunting and drinking wine, I am carefree and happy. In the future, if I miss brother, I will naturally go to Liao Kingdom and pay you a visit." He and AhZi have been separated for a long time, he was worried about her injuries, and said: "Brother, please go back early to avoid worrying your family and subordinates." Both of them paid their respect and parted with each other.

Xiao Feng turned his horse around, and he was greeted by a dozen tribesmen led by AguDa. AguDa saw that Xiao Feng did not return after going out for a long time, fearing the devious trick of the red robed man, he brought his men and came to assist. Xiao Feng narrated that he had released him back to Liao Kingdom. AguDa was also a great and wise hero, seeing Xiao Feng value human ties more than material wealth and also being open-minded and generous, he could only marvel at Xiao Feng's character.

One day, Xiao Feng, AhZi and AguDa were engaged in idle chats, they talked about the origins of AhZi's injury, Xiao Feng knew that the injury was erroneously inflicted by his palm force, although her life was sustained by ginseng, her injury still did not recover after such a long time and this was extremely worrying. AguDa said: "Brother Xiao, it seems your sister suffered external injuries, for bruises and falls, we Jurchen have always been using a medicine mixture of tiger tendon, tiger bones and bear gall, and it is efficacious, why don't we try it?" Xiao Feng was extremely happy and said:

“We do not have anything, but for tiger tendon and tiger bone, we have the most, as for bear gall, I can try to kill a bear for it.” Immediately he ask about the medicine formula, he mixed the tiger tendon and tiger bone into a cream, and fed it to AhZi.

This early morning, Xiao Feng went alone into the remote mountains to hunt bears. As he was hunting alone, he could freely executed his lightness martial arts, and this was much convenient than following a hunting party. During the first day, he did not spot any black bear but he hunted one on the second day. He removed the bear gall, ran back to camp, and fed it to AhZI. Tiger tendons, tiger bones, bear gall, all these ingredients are hard to find. Although Divine Physician Xue possesses amazing medical knowledge, there is a limit as to how much medicine he can prescribe, it's really beyond his financial ability to prescribe old mountain ginseng to be eaten for meals, and to be like Xiao Feng, finding one or two bear gall everyday to feed AhZi, it is really difficult to accomplish.

This day, Xiao Feng was at the tent's entrance concocting the tiger bone paste, a Jurchen hurriedly came over and said: “Brother Xiao, a dozen Khitans came bearing gift for you.” Xiao Feng nodded, he knew it was gifted by his sworn brother Yelu Ji. He heard the trampling of horse hoofs, one line of horses slowly came over, the horsebacks packed full of items.

The Khitan captain listened to Yelu Ji's description of Xiao Feng's appearance, as soon as he saw Xiao Feng, he leaped off the horse and knelt down before him and said: “After parting with Master Xiao, my Lord miss you terribly, he ordered subordinate to deliver these gifts, and he invites Master Xiao to stay in Liao capital” He gave a few kowtow, presented the gift's list with both hands, looking extremely respectful.

Xiao Feng received the gift list, smiled and said: “Thank you for the effort, please rise!” He opened the gift list, only

to see Khitan text, he said: "I don't understand the writing, I don't want to peruse it anymore." The attendant said: "This meagre gift are five thousand liang gold, fifty thousand liang silver, two thousand rolls of brocade, one thousand dan of high-quality wheat, one thousand fat cows, five thousand fat sheeps, three thousand gallant horses and in addition there is an assortment of accessories and jewelries."

Xiao Feng was startled when he heard it, there was so much gifts, it was ten times more than what PoLaSu asked for in ransom, he had just seen over ten horses carrying these items, but the gift amount was simply too great, based on his estimate, it would require countless horse carriages to store them.

The attendant bowed and said: "My master feared the animal might lose their way during the journey, thus we prepared extra cattle, sheep and horses. Relying on my Lord and Master Xiao's good fortune, subordinate did not meet any disaster or wild beasts, the losses are minimal." Xiao Feng sighed: "Such thoughtfulness from Brother Yelu Ji, if I refuse to accept, I will be letting down his good intentions, but if I accept, it wouldn't really seem right." The attendant replied: "My Lord repeatedly reminded me, if Master Xiao refuse the gift, I will be heavily punished when I return."

Suddenly he heard the blowing of trumpets, the Jurchens in the encampment took out their blades and bows, all of them rushed out of their tents. Someone shouted: "The enemy is striking, prepare to engage them." Xiao Feng look towards the direction where the trumpet sound came from, he saw dust cloud gathering, it seemed there were countless cavalry coming towards them.

The attendant shouted: "Everyone please do not panic, all these are Master Xiao's sheep, cattle and horses." He's using Jurchen's language to shout repeatedly, but none of the Jurchens believed him, HeLiBu, PoLaSu, AguDa organized the tribesmen, they formed a contingent to the west of the camp.



For the first time, Xiao Feng saw the Jurchens arranging their formation to prepare for war, he thought: "The Jurchens are few in number, but all of them are ferocious and agile. Although Brother YeLu Ji's men are amazing, they cannot compare against these brave and agile Jurchens, as for the Song troops, there's no need to even compare."

The attendant said: "I will go and greet my subordinate and ask them to stop advancing, so as to avoid any misunderstanding." He turned around and mounted his horse and travelled west ward. AguDa waved his hand and four Jurchen hunters mounted their horses, they tailed the attendant. As the five men slowly advanced with their horses, they reach the vicinity, but they saw cattles, sheeps and horses blanketing the mountains and plains, one hundred Khitan herdsmen were herding the animals with sticks, there were no soldiers.

The four Jurchen hunters smiled and turned around to report to HeLiBu. After a while, the livestock came near, the cows mooed and the horses neighed, they were making a huge racket that drown out the voices of every one. That night Xiao Feng invited the Jurchens to slaughter the sheep and cattle in honor of the foreign guests. The next day he gifted a lot of gold, silver and satin to the group of travellers. When the Khitans left, he gifted all the gold, silver, brocade, cattles, sheeps and horses to AguDa, and asked him to redistribute to the tribesmen. The Jurchens lived together as a tribe, they do not own any private property, whatever an individual owns it was equivalent to the tribe owning it, even though Xiao Feng was generous, no body found it strange, but acquiring so much wealth out of the blue, everyone was naturally happy. The tribe threw huge banquets for several days, everyone was grateful to Xiao Feng.

Summer past and autumn arrived, AhZi's injury had some improvement again. As she regained full consciousness, she became bored having to lie in the tent every day, and she

often ask Xiao Feng to take her on horse riding trips to relieve her boredom. Both of them rode on the same horse, and she leaned on Xiao Feng's chest, it did not require any effort from her part. Xiao Feng was always accommodating towards her, in the course of this few months, except during blizzard, the two of them were always out roaming about. Eventually they got bored roaming the vicinity, they took a tent and camped far out and did not return to the tribe for a few days. Xiao Feng took this opportunity to hunt tigers and bears, and dig for ginseng. Due to AhZi's sneak attack on Xiao Feng with a poison needle, the bear and tiger of Changbai Mountain suffered a big misfortune, countless animals have to die by Xiao Feng's palm for her treatment.

In order to dig for ginseng easily, Xiao Feng had to travel east or north. On this day, AhZi said they have seen all the scenery in the east and north, and she wanted to travel to the west. Xiao Feng said: "There is only big grass plains in the west, there is no scenery." AhZi replied: "Big grass plain is good, it's like the ocean, I have never seen a real ocean. Although our XingXiu Sea can be considered a sea, but it has border and shores"

Xiao Feng heard her mention the three words "XingXiu Sea", and his heart grew cold, after living with the Jurchen for all these years, he gradually forgot all the events in the martial world. When AhZi was immobilized, there was no one to mess things up, and he focused only on saving her life, but now that she recovered, her viciousness flared up again, how should he resolve this?

He turned around and glanced at AhZi, her snow-white face still did not have the slightest bit of color, her cheeks slightly pinched, her big pair of eye sunken, her appearance was extremely haggard and her body emaciated. Xiao Feng could not help but feel guilty: "She survived but became a walking skeleton, why do I only remember her flaws?" He laughed and said: "Since you like to travel west, let us travel west. AhZi, once there is great improvement in your injuries,

I'll take you to the Korean borders to look at the ocean, the boundless clear water as far as the eye can see, the scenery will truly be amazing."

AhZi clapped and grinned: "Of course, of course, actually we don't have to wait until I recover completely, we can go now." Xiao Feng gave a "Yi" sound, he was shocked and happy: "AhZi, your hand can move again." AhZi smiled and said: "I could move my hands fourteen days ago, and today they became much more nimble." Xiao Feng said happily: "Wonderful! You naughty girl, how long do you intend to keep it from me?" AhZi flashed a sly look in her eyes, smiled and said: "I would rather not move forever, only then will you accompany me like this every day. Once I recovered, you will naturally chase me away again."

Xiao Feng listened to her speak her sincere feelings, his sense of pity rose spontaneously, and he said: "I am a boorish man, I accidentally injured you and you ended up in this sorry state. What good will it do for you to accompany me every day?"

AhZi did not reply, after a long pause, she whispered: "Brother-in-law, why did you exert so much strength when you hit me with your palm that day?" Xiao Feng did not wish to bring up the past, he shook his head and said: "The incident had long passed, why bring it up again? AhZi, I injured you to such a state, I feel terribly apologetic, do you hate me?" AhZi said: "I do not hate you. Why would I hate you? I originally wanted you to accompany me, aren't you accompanying me now? I am very happy."

As Xiao Feng listened to her, he thought that her intention was bizarre, but her recent conduct was indeed excellent, and thus it must be due to his attentive care which got rid of her vicious temperament, and he went back to the tribe to prepare the horses, carriage, tents, dried rations and other things for their journey west.

The next morning, the two of them headed west. After travelling about ten li, AhZi asked: "Brother-in-law, have you

guessed it?" Xiao Feng said: "Guess what?" AhZi said: "Do you know the reason why I attacked you with the poison needle that day?" Xiao Feng shook his head and said: "Your thoughts are difficult to pin down, how can I guess?" AhZi sighed and said: "Since you can't guess then just forget it. Brother-in-law, there are so many geese here, why do they arrange in formation and fly south? "

Xiao Feng looked up, he saw two formation of geese, and they lined up to form an arrowhead and they flew south, he said: "The weather is getting cold, geese are afraid of the cold, they are flying south to take refuge against the cold. AhZi said: "Then why do they fly back during spring? Flying back and forth yearly, isn't it tiring? If they are cold, just stay in the south permanently and don't come back."

Xiao Feng devoted himself to the study of martial arts, he never gave a thought about the habits of animals and pests, under her questioning he did not know how to reply, he shook his head and laughed: "I do not know why they are not afraid of hardships, I guess these wild geese are born in the north, they are nostalgic and return home."

AhZi nodded: "It must be true. Look at the last geese, its body is not large, but it is also flying south. Eventually, when its father, mother, sister and brother-in-law all return north, it will naturally follow them back."

Xiao Feng heard her say "Sister, Brother-in-law" these four words, his heart was moved, and he turned his head to look at her, only to see her staring blankly at the geese formation, apparently her words were unintentional, he wondered: "With a casual word, she associated me with her parents, it seems that in her heart, she treat me as her closest relative. I cannot abandon her casually. When she recovered, I have to escort her to Dali and hand her over to her parents, only then will I complete the task I have been entrusted with."

The two of them gossiped along the way. When AhZi got tired, Xiao Feng immediately carried her off the horse and

let her rest in the carriage. At dusk, he set up the camp in the woods. As they travelled for a few days, they finally reached the borders of the grass plains.

AhZi gazed into the distant, the grass plain was boundless and vast, she said happily: "The borders only cannot be seen in the west, but to be truly like an ocean, the borders must not be seen in all four direction." Xiao Feng knew that she wanted to travel to the center of the grass plain, not wanting to go against her wish, he whipped the horse and travelled west.

Travelling west on the grass plain for a few days, when you look to all four directions, the borders of the grass plain really cannot be seen anymore. The weather was currently crisp autumn, along with the smell of the green grass, it was really refreshing and carefree. Many small beasts reside in the grass, Xiao Feng can hunt them for food easily and he felt carefree.

After a few days, in the afternoon, countless tents can be seen in the far distance, there were also banners and flags, it seemed like a military camp, or it may be a tribe gathering. Xiao Feng said: "There's a lot of people at the front, I don't know what they are doing, let's just go back, we don't want to stir up trouble." AhZi said: "No! No! I want to go and watch. I can't move my legs, how to stir up trouble for you?" Xiao Feng smiled and said: "Trouble will definitely come, it does not have to be caused by you, sometimes people just want to provoke you and you can never avoid such thing. AhZi laughed and replied: "Let's just go and take a look, there is no harm."

Xiao Feng knew her child-like disposition, she just love to watch rowdy spectacle, he guided the horse over slowly. The terrain of the grass plain was flat, although the tents can be spotted far away, but the route to it was quite far. After travelling for seven li, the "Wu Wu" call of the bugle can be heard loudly, followed closely by a gathering dust cloud, two

cavalry ranks scattered off, a troop went north, and the other galloped south.

Xiao Feng was slightly surprised, and said: "Not good, it is the Khitan cavalry!" AhZi said: "It's your own people, it can't be better, why did you say it's not good?" Xiao Feng said: "I don't know them, let's just go back." He turned the horse and headed back, after travelling a few steps, they heard the "Peng Peng" sound of the drums, and several troops of cavalry rushed forward. Xiao Feng pondered: "It doesn't seem like there are any enemy around, are they practicing their tactical deployment?"

Suddenly he heard a loud cry: "Shoot the deer, shoot the deer!" West, north, south, the call to shoot the deer was shouted from all three directions. Xiao Feng said: "They are hunting in the vicinity, their number is really not small." He carried AhZi onto the horseback immediately, reined in the horse, and observed afar on the eastern road.

The Khitan horsemen were wearing brocade robes, coupled with metal armors. The robes came in various color team, red team, green team, yellow team, purple team, the flag of the team are of the same color, the cavalry galloped back and forth, displaying a strong military presence, it is truly a magnificent sight. Xiao Feng and AhZi secretly applauded. The soldiers advanced and retreated according to military orders, armed with spears they cornered the deer, they only gave a glance when they spotted Xiao Feng and AhZi, and ignored them subsequently.

Four troops of cavalry surrounded from all four sides and trapped ten deers in the middle. Occasionally, a deer will escape from a gap in the cavalry rank, and a small squad will break off to chase and force the deer back into the encirclement.

## Chapter 27: Quelling the Rebellion with Golden Axe

Fan translation by d4rksinz [Second Edition]

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As Xiao Feng watched, he suddenly heard someone shouted: "Is that venerable Master Xiao?" Xiao Feng thought: "Who recognize me?" Turning his head, he saw someone rode out of the green cavalry troop, it was the captain sent by YeLu Ji to deliver the gifts a few months ago.

He rode toward Xiao Feng until he was within ten zhang, quickly dismounted, rushed forward and knelt down with his right knee and said: "My Lord is waiting for you not far away. His Lordship talked about Master Xiao frequently, he misses you terribly. What good fortune brought Master Xiao here? I invite you to meet my Lord with haste." Xiao Feng heard that YeLu Ji was near the vicinity, with great joy he said: "I was just roaming around freely, I did not know my sworn brother is near, this cannot be better. Good, please lead me to meet him."

The attendant blew a whistle, two horsemen came riding swiftly. The attendant said: "Report quickly, say Master Xiao from Changbai Mountain is coming!" The two riders received the order and sped off quickly. The rest of the troops continued to shoot the deers, the attendant led a troop of green-robed cavalry to protect Xiao Feng and AhZi and they travelled west. When YeLu Ji sent large quantity of gold, silver, cattles and sheeps, Xiao Feng knew instantly that he was a Khitan noble, after seeing such a sight, he expected that his sworn brother must be some general or high ranking official.

On the grass plains, troops travelled back and forth endlessly, all of them wearing brightly colored armor. The attendant said: "Master Xiao arrived at a good time,

tomorrow morning, it will be bustling with activity here.” Xiao Feng saw AhZi lit up and he ask: “What kind of activity?” The attendant replied that there will be a martial arts competition. There are two vacant positions for commanding officers of Yongchang and Taihe military. The Khitan soldiers will showcase their martial art skills, whoever is lucky, they will become the commanding officers.

Once Xiao Feng heard that there will be a martial arts competition, he was naturally exuberant and in high-spirits, he laughed: “This truly is a coincidence, I will finally get to see Khitan’s martial arts.” AhZi smiled and said: “Captain, just display your skills tomorrow, I will congratulate you in becoming the commanding officer.” The attendant replied: “I am a lowly person, why would I dare to try?” AhZi smiled and said: “What’s so difficult about winning the commanding officer post? As long as my brother-in-law is willing to teach you two or three moves, you will definitely win the commanding officer post.” The attendant happily said: “If Master Xiao is willing to give directions to me, it will really save my life. But as for the commanding officer position, I do not have the fate and I do not wish to hanker after it.”

They travelled around ten li as they gossiped along the way, suddenly they saw a cavalry troop galloped over. The attendant said: “It’s the flying bear squadron from the fur-skin army of the main camp.” The squadron officers wore bear skin clothes, black bear skin robes, white bear skin hats, and they looked very mighty. As the squadron neared, they cried in unison, dismounted at the same time, separated in two columns and said: “Respectfully welcome Master Xiao!” Xiao Feng replied: “I don’t dare! I don’t dare!” and raised his hands to salute, he moved forward and the flying bear squadron followed closely behind.

After travelling for ten li, they saw another squadron, clothed with tiger skin, the flying tiger squad came over to welcome them. Xiao Feng thought: “I don’t know what



ranking official my Brother YeLu is, he can organize such grand stuff.” But the attendant refused to comment, and YeLu Ji refused to reveal the last time they met, and thus Xiao Feng did not want to probe further.

As they travelled until dusk, they reach a large tent, a troop wearing leopard skin clothes, the flying leopard squadron greeted and escorted Xiao Feng and AhZi to the center of the large tent. Xiao Feng thought that he would be able to meet YeLu Ji when he entered the tent, the rugs and items in the tent were all exquisite, the table was filled with dishes and fruits, however there was no one in the tent. The leader of the flying leopard squadron said: “His Lordship invites Master Xiao to rest here for tonight. He will meet you another day.” Xiao Feng did not inquire further, sat down, and start drinking wine. Four army sergeants refilled the wine and cut the meats, respectfully serving him.

After waking up the next morning, they travelled west for two hundred li, and they rested in another large tent during night fall.

In the afternoon of the third day, the attendant said: “After crossing that mountainside, we will reach our destination.” Xiao Feng saw the atmosphere of the mountain was magnificent, the “Hua Hua” sound of flowing water as it flows swiftly from the mountainside to down south. As the group crossed the mountainside, they saw flags fluttering before their eyes, tents were packed closely and filled the entire grassland, tens of thousands of cavalry circled a vast open space in the center. The officers of the flying bear squadron, flying tiger and flying leopard took out their horns, they blew and a “Wu Wu Wu” sound reverberated.

Suddenly the drums rang out loudly, “Peng Peng Peng”, cannon fire came from the mountain, officers and soldiers at the open space split into two columns, a majestic yellow horse galloped towards Xiao Feng, and someone shouted: “Brother Xiao, brother misses you terribly!” Xiao Feng mounted a horse and met up with him, both dismounted at

the same time, their hands grasping, their joy cannot be contained.

From all four directions, the soldiers shouted in unison: "Long live the king! Long live the king! Long live the king!"

Xiao Feng was shocked: "Why do the soldiers keep cheering long live the king!" He looked around, every single soldiers were bowing, their blades leaning on the ground, YeLu Ji was holding his hand and standing in the middle, looking to the east and west, his expression pleased. Stunned, Xiao Feng said: "Brother, you ... you are ..." YeLu Ji laughed and said: "At that time, if you knew I am the current emperor of Great Liao, I'm afraid you will refuse to swear brotherhood with me. Brother Xiao, my real full name is YeLu Hongji. I survived due to your grace, I will remember it forever and never forget it."

Although Xiao Feng was open-minded and heroic, he has never seen an emperor before in his life, seeing such splendor, he cannot help but feel embarrassed and said: "Subordinate did not know your majesty, I greatly offended you, I deserve to die!" and he knelt down immediately. He is a Khitan, he should kneel down and worship when meeting Khitan's emperor.

YeLu Hongji quickly held out his hand and propped him up, smiling he said: "You are not guilty as you do not know about it, Brother, you are my sworn brother, we will only talk about our brotherhood today, it won't be late to pay respect to the monarch tomorrow." He waved his left hand, and the troops started drumming music to welcome the honored guest. YeLu Hongji held onto Xiao Feng hands and both of them entered a big tent.

The tent of Liao emperor was made of several layers of leather with numerous flying gold ribbons, it was glorious and brilliant, the residence was known as the great leather tent. YeLu Hongji sat in the middle, and ordered Xiao Feng to sit at the first seat across his, after a while civil and military officials came in to pay their respect, Lord of Northern

Chancellery, Chancellor of Northern Chancellery, Chancellor of Southern Chancellery, and many more, generals of the great leather tent, junior generals, cavalry commanders, infantry commanders, etc, Xiao Feng can't possibly remember all of them at the moment.

A banquet was held in the tent that night, the Khitan people respected women, and thus AhZi was also invited to feast in the great leather tent. Wine as deep as pond, meat piled as high as mountain, AhZi was jubilant when she saw all these.

Everyone drank to their heart's content, the Khitan's warriors entertained the emperor by dueling in front of him, their upper body naked, it was an intense fight as they wrestled fiercely. Xiao Feng saw that these Khitan warriors are skillful, had strong muscular strength, a set of martial art moves can be seen in their tossing and lifting, although the variations was not as ingenious as martial arts from Central Plains, but if employed in a real battlefield, it's actually more effective than martial arts from Central Plains.

The various Liao officials all approached Xiao Feng to propose a toast. Xiao Feng could not refuse and emptied every cup of wine toasted, eventually he drank over three hundred cups, his expression completely unchanged, the crowd was astonished.

YeLu Hongji was proud of his own bravery and prowess, the deed by Xiao Feng in capturing him was known throughout Liao Empire, thus he intended Xiao Feng to showcase his superhuman abilities to cover up the humiliation of being captured, he did not expect that Xiao Feng did not need to take part in tomorrow's martial art competition to display his abilities, the current display of drinking prowess was sufficient to convince the crowd and gained everyone's admiration. YeLu Hongji was overjoyed, he said: "Brother, you are the number one hero in my Liao Empire!"

Suddenly AhZi interrupted and said: "He is not number one!" YeLu Hongji laughed and said: "Little girl, how did he become number two? Then who is the number one hero?" AhZi said: "The number one hero is naturally your majesty. Although my brother-in-law's ability is great, he have to obey you and he cannot go against you, aren't you the number one hero? ". She is XingXiu Elder's favored disciple, proficient in the art of flattery, all these words are a piece of cake for her.

YeLu Hongji laughed and said: "Well said, well said. Brother Xiao, I want to confer an extremely high-rank post for you, let me think, what should I confer you?" At this moment, he's already eighty to ninety percent drunk, he drummed his forehead with his finger. Xiao Feng quickly said: "No, no, subordinate is careless, not suitable for riches, I have always been roaming the four corners of earth, never staying for certain, I really don't want to be an official." YeLu Hongji replied: "No problem, I'll confer you a high-rank post that do not require any work done, you only need to drink wine ....." before he could finish speaking, the "Wu Wu Wu" sound of bugle came from afar, the sound was sharp and urgent.

The Liao people were originally sitting on the floor, drinking wine and eating meat, but upon hearing this bugle, they stood up in unison, their face frightened and devoid of color. The bugle call came quickly, the original call was ten li away, the second call came a few li closer, the third call came even closer by a few more li. Xiao Feng pondered: "Even with the fastest horse, or the highest level of lightness martial arts, it can't be faster than this bugle call. Yes, signal stations must have been pre-arranged and used to deliver urgent military news, once the first bugle call is heard, they will relay it to the next station, so forth and so on." The bugle call was delivered quickly and it stopped abruptly when it reached the great leather tent. Hundreds of officers and men in the tents where originally cheering and partying,

it was extremely noisy and chaotic, upon hearing the call they became mute.

YeLu Hongji expression was calm, he slowly lifted his golden cup, drank all the wine and said: "There's a rebellion in the capital, de-camp, we will return immediately."

The marching generals immediately went out to issue orders, once they heard the single word "De-camp", they relay the words and it became ten, and this ten became hundred, hundred became thousand, the word became louder and louder, it was serious and orderly, and it seems there was no hint of panic. Xiao Feng pondered: "My great Liao Empire has been established for over two hundred years, our Empire shook the entire world by force, currently there is civil strife, but no one panicked, it seems every generation of Liao leader is competent in commanding the army."

The sound of horse hoofs were heard, the advance party galloped off, followed by the left and right vanguard, the forward troops, left troops, right troops, troop after troop headed south back to the capital.

YeLu Hongji held Xiao Feng's hand and said: "Let's go take a look." He went out of the tent alone, in the middle of the night, lanterns were hung on every military banner, red, yellow, blue and white, all these colored lanterns illuminated the area, the remaining ten thousands of troops were travelling down south, no one spoke a word and only the neighing of horses can be heard. Xiao Feng was greatly impressed and thought: "Look at the way he has control of the army, who can go against him? That day the emperor bravely went out hunting alone and he accidentally got captured by me, if his army really did press on and attack, although the Jurchens are strong and valiant, they will hopelessly be outnumbered and defeated."

Once the two of them left the tent, the guards de-tent immediately and kept everything neatly, luggage and supplies all loaded onto the horse carriage. The commander-

in-chief of the main army issued his orders, and the main army moved off immediately. The Lord of Northern Chancellery, chancellor, advisers and tutors all of them stayed near YeLu Hongji, their face solemn, but they all acted in unison. Although they knew about the rebellion, but they still did not know who led this rebellion and what is the exact situation of the chaos.

The huge party travelled south for three days, during the night after setting camp, a scout galloped back and reported to YeLu Hongji: "The Lord of Southern Chancellery staged this rebellion, he has occupied the main Palace, the empress dowager, empress, prince, princess and over one hundred officials and their family members, all have been captured."

YeLu Hongji had a huge shock, and his expression became grave.

The military affairs of Liao Empire were handled by the Northern and Southern Chancellery, the Lord of Northern Chancellery accompanied the emperor for the current hunting trip, and the Lord of Southern Chancellery stayed behind to guard the capital. The Lord of Southern Chancellery is YeLu NieLuGu, his title is Prince of Chu, it doesn't matter if he rebelled, but his father is YeLu ZhongYuan, the uncle of the emperor and supreme commander of the army, it was no small matter.

YeLu Hongji's grandfather YeLu LongXu, was known as the Holy Emperor in Liao's history. The Holy Emperor eldest son was ZongZhen, the second son ZhongYuan. ZongZhen's character was kind and generous, ZhongYuan was valiant and gifted in military strategy. When the Holy Emperor was about to pass away, he designated ZongZhen to succeed the throne, but the empress favored her second son, and she plotted to make ZhongYuan emperor. In Liao's tradition, the Empress Dowager is extremely powerful, thus ZongZhen could not fully consolidate his power as the emperor, and his life was also in danger, but ZongYuan informed his brother of their mother's scheme, and her scheme was thwarted.

ZongZhen was naturally grateful to his brother and bestowed the rank of royal emperor brother, making him next in line to succeed the throne.

YeLu ZongZhen was known in Liao's history as the Prosperous Emperor, but after his death, the throne was not passed on to the royal emperor brother ZhongYuan, but passed on to his son Hongji.

After assuming the throne, YeLu Hongji felt apologetic, and he conferred ZhongYuan as the royal emperor uncle, and this again made him next in line to succeed the throne, in addition he also made ZhongYuan the supreme commander of the entire army, exempted him from kneeling during court session, bestowed him gold and scriptures, mortar board, two-color robe, and gave him preferential treatment, he became the most powerful figure in Liao Empire; YeLu Hongji also conferred ZhongYuan's son the title of Prince of Chu, giving him full control of military affairs in Southern Chancellery, and hence he was known as Lord of Southern Chancellery.

When the Holy Emperor died YeLu ZhongYuan could assume the throne with the help of the Dowager, but he gave it up and supported his brother, and this showed that he valued loyalty, and he also kept quiet about the entire incident. When YeLu Hongji left to go hunting, he did not have the slightest suspicion and let his uncle handled all the military affairs. When the bugle call came, and the rebellion was actually led by the Lord of Southern Chancellery YeLu NieLuGu, YeLu Hongji was naturally shocked and worried, rumor goes that NieLuGu's disposition was vicious and ruthless, since he plotted the rebellion, there's no reason his father will do nothing about it.

The Lord of Northern Chancellery said: "Your Majesty need not be overly worried, your uncle is an understanding person, he will not allow his unfilial son to rebel, it's possible that he had already deployed the army and quelled the rebellion." YeLu Hongji replied: "I really hope so."

After they finished their dinner, the second scout rushed in and reported: "The Lord of Southern Chancellery made his father the emperor, the imperial decree announced it to the rest of the world." He did not dare continue his words, and presented the new emperor's edict with both hands. Hongji perused the edict, the edict said that YeLu Hongji was a fake emperor who tried to usurp the throne, the royal emperor brother was the legitimate emperor, and hence the army was mobilized to resolve this issue. YeLu Hongji was so furious that he threw the edict into the fire and burnt it to ashes, but his heart was worried and he pondered: "This fake emperor affair sounds convincing, once the Liao army and citizen sees the edict, their loyalty will waver. My uncle is the supreme commander of the entire army, he have the authority to mobilize eight hundred thousand troops with just a wave of his hand, not to mention the troops under the jurisdiction of his son the Lord of Southern Chancellery. I only have around one hundred thousand troops following me, I am heavily outnumbered, what should I do?" he tossed and turned throughout the night, unable to sleep.

When Xiao Feng heard the emperor wanting to confer an official post, he wanted to bring AhZi and leave during the night without saying goodbye, but seeing the crisis faced by his sworn brother, it's inconvenient to simply walk away, he wanted to do something for him on account of their brotherhood. That night as he was strolling outside the camp, he heard secret discussions among the troops, the emperor's parents and wife all lived in the capital, since they are held hostage by the royal emperor uncle, they would most probably not survive. Some of the troops were worried about their own family members and they suddenly cried. The cry was infectious, the rest of the officers and soldiers could relate to their situation, and one by one they began to cry. The commanders and generals tried to persuade them to stop, they targeted those that cried especially loud, but they could not stop them from crying.



The cries were earth-shattering, YeLu Hongji knew the troop's spirit was broken and he became even more troubled.

Early next morning, the scout came to report, the royal emperor uncle and his son were leading five hundred thousand troops, they were heading north to intercept them. YeLu Hongji pondered: "In such a situation, we cannot retreat, even if we are utterly defeat, we can only fight till death." Immediately, he summoned his officers and began discussing. The ministers and officials were all extremely loyal to YeLu Hongji and they were willing to fight to the death, but they were worried about the army's morale.

Hongji passed down his orders: "All officers and soldiers, after we resolve this situation, you will be promoted and also receive heavy rewards." He donned his golden armor and helmet, personally led three troops, and galloped off to meet the troops of his uncle. All officers and men saw the emperor personally leading the troops to meet the enemy, at once their courage received a large boost, they gave three cheers and pledged loyalty till death. The one hundred thousand troops divided into four sections, the advance troop, left troop, right troop and main troop, their armor clanking, they marched southward, in addition a small squad scattered and roamed both flanks.

Xiao Feng took up a bow and spear and followed beside Hongji, becoming his personal bodyguard. The flying bear troops protected AhZi and they positioned at the rear of the army. Xiao Feng saw YeLu Hongji frowning, and knew he did not have confidence in winning this battle.

As they travelled till noon, they heard the bugle called out again in front. The main army general commanded: "Dismount!" All the troops dismounted and pulled their horse bridle, only YeLu Hongji and his ministers were still on horseback.

Xiao Feng did not understand why the troops dismounted, he was puzzled. YeLu Hongji smiled and said: "Brother, you stayed in Central Plains for such long time, you don't know about how we Khitan fight wars, correct?" Xiao Feng said: "I was about to invite Your Majesty to enlighten me." Hongji smiled and said: "Haha, this emperor position, I don't know if I can hang onto it until sun down. We should address each other as brothers, why do you have to address me as your majesty?" Xiao Feng heard bitterness in his laughter and said: "The two armies have yet to cross swords, Your Majesty, please do not worry." Hongji said: "When clashing on flat terrain, the horse strength is of upmost importance, we can charge into enemy lines and press forward relentlessly. We Khitans attacked the east and west and secured victory in every battle, this is the secret to our success."

As he finished speaking, dust cloud began gathering in the distant and towered over ten zhang high, it was as if yellow cloud was gushing over the ground. Hongji pointing with his whip said: "My uncle and his son are war veterans, they are valiant generals of Liao Empire, but now why do they gallop over anxiously and not conserve their horse strength? Hmmm, it seems they are over-confident and thinks they will win for certain." As he finished speaking, the bugle call was heard simultaneously from the left and right troops. Xiao Feng looked to the distant, the enemy have two cavalry troops to the east, another two cavalry troops to the west, they were outnumbered five to one.

YeLu Hongji turned pale, he said to the main army general: "Get into formation and set up stockade!" The general replied: "Yes!" He rode off and passed down the orders, immediately the advance troops, left troops and right troops all turned back, the sergeants nailed the pillars of the great leather tent with a large hammer into the ground, spread out the tent cover, set up abatis on all four sides, and built a large wooden stockade on the grassland, the troops

defended all four sides during construction, around ten thousand archers took up position in the wooden stockade, their bows drawn and waiting for the order to shoot.

Xiao Feng furrowed his brow and thought: "Once they start fighting, regardless of the outcome, countless dead bodies of my Khitan tribe will be strewn all over the place, it's best if we win, but if we lose, I can only escort AhZi and my sworn brother to a safe place. It doesn't matter if he can't be the emperor anymore."

Not long after building the stockade, the enemy troops arrived but they did not engage immediately, they stood at a distant spot, beyond the range of the archers. The drum beat endlessly, troops after troops of rebels came from all four directions, formed their battle formations and surrounded them. Xiao Feng gazed across the battlefield, the enemies were everywhere and he can't even see the end, he pondered: "My sworn brother's army is too heavily outnumbered, I'm afraid we will lose for certain. It's not convenient to escape during the day, we can try to hold on until nightfall and then I will think of something to save them." Seeing the huge stockade cast a small shadow on the ground, it is currently noon.

There was numerous "Ya Ya Ya" sound, a flock of geese flew by in the sky. YeLu Hongji raised his head and gazed for a long time, he said bitterly: "Unless we can transform ourselves into geese and fly away, we will never be able to escape." The expression of the Lord of Northern Chancellery and generals changed, they knew the emperor became fearful after seeing the rebel army.

The drums thundered within enemy ranks, over one hundred skin-drums vibrated with "Peng Peng" sound. The general of the main army shouted: "Beat the drums!" Hundreds of skin-drums in the stockade also vibrated with "Peng Peng" sound. The drums echoed in unison with enemy's drum, over tens of thousands of cavalry cried out

and shook the field, they stuck out their spears and charged forward.

Seeing the enemy rushed towards their front troops, the main army general waved his command-flag, the drums stopped drumming, and tens of thousands of arrows shot out simultaneously, the enemy's front troops all fell onto the ground. But the next wave followed closely behind, and charges forward bravely, horses that fell down in front became the meat-shield for those behind. The enemy infantry archers were armed with shields, they rushed forward and shot their arrows towards the stockade.

YeLu Hongji was only shocked in the beginning, as the fight broke out, immediately his courage multiplied, standing at high ground, holding onto his blade, he gave orders and commanded, the soldiers in the stockade saw the emperor personally supervising the front line, and they shouted loudly: "Long live the king! Long live the king! Long live the king!" Hearing "Long live the king", the enemy troops looked up and saw YeLu Hongji in his golden armor, standing on the high platform in the stockade, under his impressive display of power, they could not help but leap back and stop pushing forward. Hongji saw this golden opportunity and shouted: "Left cavalry out flank, charge!"

The left troop was led by Northern Chancellery Chancellor, once they heard the emperor orders, thirty thousand cavalry immediately moved to out flank the enemy. A moment of hesitation in the rebel army, and cavalry from the stockade had arrived. The rebels were thrown into confusion and quickly moved back. The drums in the stockade thundered, after a short engagement, the rebels were quickly forced to retreat. The cavalries from the stockade pursued and killed them, their manner sharp and imposing.

Xiao Feng was overjoyed and cried out: "Brother, we scored a huge victory for this round!" YeLu Hongji got down from the platform and mounted his battle horse, leading

more troops to support. Suddenly, the bugle sounded, rebel main forces drove forward, the rebel's front troop turned around and fought back, in a split second, arrows and spears flew back and forth across the battlefield, screams shook the sky, blood and flesh flew in every direction. Xiao Feng was secretly shocked: "I have never seen such ferocious fighting in my life. Even if your martial art is peerless, it's completely useless in the mist of millions of cavalries, at most you can use it to protect yourself. Such large armies engaging in war, it cannot be mentioned in the same breath as those group fights or duels in the martial arts world."

Suddenly the gongs rang out behind the rebel's army, it was the gong to call off the battle. The rebel's cavalry retreated, arrows rained to provide cover for their retreat. The main army general and the Chancellor of Northern Chancellery led the troops to charge three times, they broke through every time and caused confusion in the enemy formation, but thousands of them were also shot dead. YeLu Hongji said: "Our soldiers suffered too many losses, let's withdraw for the time being.", and they beat the gongs and withdrew the troops.

The rebels also sent out two troops of cavalry to pursue, but the central army was prepared, they pretended to retreat but encircled them from both wings, three thousand rebels were surrounded and annihilated, the remaining few hundred dismounted and surrendered. Hongji wave his left hand, soldiers came out of the stockade armed with spears and pierced the hundred rebels to death. This ferocious battle lasted no more than an hour, but the killings were unusually tragic and cruel.

The main forces of both sides retreated ten zhang from each other, the middle zone between them was filled with corpses, the wounded were moaning and wailing, it was unbearably tragic. Both sides sent out a troop of three hundred black robed soldiers, the people from the stockade wore yellow hats, the enemy wore white hats, they move

forward to the middle zone to examine the wounded. Xiao Feng thought these black robed soldiers would carry the injured back for medical treatment, but instead they took out their blades and killed the wounded soldiers. After all the injured soldiers were hacked to death, the six hundred black robed soldiers shouted in unison and began to fight each other.

The martial arts of the six hundred black robed soldiers were not weak, their blades flashed and they fought bravely, after a while, over two hundred people were cut down. The black robed soldiers from the stockade had better martial arts, they only lost around ten men, and the situation immediately became two versus one, thus the victor became obvious. After a while, it became three versus one. Officers from both sides only cheered their men, the rebel army stood by and watched, they did not dispatch any soldier to provide assistance. Eventually the three hundred black robed soldiers from the rebel army were eliminated, the remaining two hundred black robed soldiers from the stockade returned back into formation. Xiao Feng pondered about the customs of Khitan: "The way they clean up the battlefield, although it is not a large scale, it is exceedingly horrifying."

Hongji raised his sabre and shouted loudly: "Although there are many rebels, they have no fighting spirit. Once we fight another round, they will definitely be routed!"

The officers and men in the stockade chanted: "Long live the king, long live the king, long live the king!"

Suddenly a bugle call was heard within rebel ranks, five men slowly rode out to the middle, one of them was holding onto a sheet of sheepskin, and he recited loudly from it, he is reciting the imperial edict from the royal emperor uncle: "YeLu Hongji usurped the throne, he's a fake king, now that the royal emperor uncle has assumed the throne, he urge the soldiers and officials of Liao Empire to return to the capital and pledge loyalty to him, all of you will be promoted

three grade.” A dozen archers fired their arrows from the stockade, whizzing sound rang out as it shot towards the announcer. The four men by his side raised their shields and protected each other, the man continued to recite aloud, their five horses were shot down but they are still hiding safely behind their shield, finally he finished reciting the edict and they turned around and left.

The Lord of Northern Chancellery saw his officials wavered after they heard the edict, he shouted: “Go out and curse them!” Ten “professional-cursers” went out, they had loud voices and thick throats, good enunciations, the first curser started insulting. Words such as treacherous traitors, being buried right here, etc, the second curser took over and carried on insulting, all sorts of vulgarities came spewing. Xiao Feng did not understand most of the curse words as he had limited knowledge on Khitan language, but he saw YeLu Hongji nod his head repeatedly, his expression approving, it seemed these “professional cursers” really put up an exciting show.

Xiao Feng looked over at the enemy formation, at a far distance, under the reflection of their yellow hat, he saw two men each riding a fine horse, they were holding horsewhip and directing around. One was clothed in yellow-robed and wearing a crown, he had a long gray beard, the other person was wearing gold armor, his face gaunt, but his expression fierce and brave. Xiao Feng thought to himself: “Look at their appearance, this must be the royal emperor uncle and his son.”

Suddenly, the ten “professional-cursers” discussed among themselves for a while, they shouted in unison and revealed the shameful secrets of the royal emperor uncle and his son. It seemed the royal emperor uncle is upright and had proper conduct, there isn’t any scandal from him, the ten men mostly targeted his son the Prince of Chu, they said he raped his father's concubine and use his father’s power to commit all kinds of evil. These words were obviously meant

to sow discord between father and son, the ten cursers shouted in unison, they cursed the exact same words, the words resonated over a few li and over hundred thousand men all heard it clearly.

The Prince of Chu waved his whip, the rebels howl in unison, they made “Ah Ah” sound and shouted randomly, the noise drowned out the words of the ten cursers.

The enemy suddenly separated and they pushed ten carts towards the stockade, the sergeant dragged out over ten females from the carts, some of them were white-hair grannies, some were youths, their clothes all grand and exquisite. Once these women were brought out, both sides stopped cursing immediately.

YeLu Hongji shouted: “Mother, mother! Son will catch these traitors and dismember them to help you vent your anger!”

That white-hair granny was the current empress dowager, she was YeLu Hongji’s mother Empress Dowager Xiao, the rest are Empress Xiao, concubines and princess. When Hongji went hunting, the royal emperor uncle and his son surrounded the Forbidden Palace and captured the empress dowager and the rest of the royals.

The Empress Dowager said: “Your Majesty need not be concerned about this old lady or your wife and children, do you best and kill these thieves!” A dozen officers drew their sabres and place it against the neck of the females, the young concubines immediately cried out in fear.

YeLu Hongji was furious and shouted: “Shoot down those crying females!” There was whizzing sounds and over ten arrows flew out, the concubines who were crying were all shot dead.

The Empress said: “Your Majesty, that was well shot! Well shot! The foundation of our forefathers cannot be destroyed by the hands of these traitors.”

The Prince of Chu saw the empress dowager and empress were stubborn, not only would he be unable to coerce



Hongji, but it might also shake the morale of his own troops, and he issued the order: "Detain these women on the carts and withdraw." The soldiers detained the empress dowager and empress in the cart and pushed it to the rear of the army. The Prince of Chu ordered: "Bring forward the family members of enemy troops!"

The whirring call of bamboo whistles were heard, the sound was bleak, the army split apart, there was endlessly clanking of iron shackles, rows after rows of male, female, old and young were all pulled to the front. In an instant their cries shook the heavens. The soldiers from the stockade are personal soldiers of the Liao emperor, YeLu Hongji treated them extremely well and even permitted their families to live in the capital, firstly this will make the troops appreciative and they would be willing to fight till death in times of trouble, secondly it also serve to keep tabs on them, they will not dare to revolt during an expedition. He did not expect this arrangement would backfire against him when he went out on the hunting trip. The family members of the soldiers numbered over two hundred thousand people, but only thirty thousand people were brought forward, a lot of these people were wrongly arrested but it's impossible to differentiate them at this moment, some of them were dragging their children and the situation was extremely messy and chaotic.

A general under the command of the Prince of Chu rode out and shouted loudly: "All soldiers in the stockade please listen, all your family members have been arrested, those who surrender will get to reunite with them, you will also be promoted three grades, and also receive extra rewards. If you do not surrender, the new emperor has issued a decree, all the people you see here will be killed." Khitan people have always been cruel and sadistic, if they say "all will be killed", it's definitely not empty threat and all these people will really be killed. Some of the soldiers in the stockade

recognized their loved ones, “Dad, mom, child, husband, wife!”, both sides keep calling out to each other.

Drums rolled in the rebel army, two thousand executioners stepped out, their sabres sparkling. The drums stopped, two thousand sabres were raised, targeting the neck of family members. The general said: “Surrender now to the new emperor, you will be heavily rewarded, else all your family members will die together!” He waved his left hand and the drums rolled again.

The soldiers in the stockade knew that if he wave his left hand again, the drums will stop, and the two thousand sabres will chop down immediately. These soldiers have always been loyal to YeLu Hongji, they are not enticed by the promise of riches or promotion, but seeing their family members waiting to be butchered, how can they not panic?

The drums rumbled without stopping, the hearts of the soldiers are beating anxiously. Suddenly, someone shouted within the stockade: “Mom, mom, you cannot kill my mom!” abandoning his spear, he ran towards an old lady.

An arrow flew out from the stockade and pierces the back of this solder. The soldier did not die immediately, and he carried on crawling towards his mother. There was endless call of “Father, mother, child”, and hundreds of soldiers ran out from the stockade. The trusted generals of YeLu Hongji took out their swords and chop randomly, but how can they stop the soldiers from running? After these hundred soldiers ran out, they were followed by another thousand. After these thousands, chaos broke out, out of his original one hundred fifty thousand troops, around sixty to seventy thousand ran over.

YeLu Hongji gave a long sigh, he knew the situation could not be salvaged, taking the opportunity as the soldiers hug and reunite with their families, there was massive chaos as the rebel army separated to make space for the family members, he quickly ordered: “Retreat towards the vast mountains in the north-west.” The main army general

secretly passed down the order, with the remaining eighty thousand men, the rear troops became the front troops, they galloped quickly to the north-west.

The Prince of Chu tried to order his cavalries to pursue but they were hindered by the civilians flooding the entire battlefield, the horses cannot gallop past them quickly, by the time they pushed away the crowd, YeLu Hongji had already led his men and escaped far away. The eighty thousand troops arrived at the foot of the vast mountain, it was dusk, and the soldiers were hungry and tired, they built a stockade on the top of the slope, occupying the high ground so as to better guard against attacks. Once the stockade was secured, the rice was not yet cooked and the Prince of Chu had arrived with his troops and they immediately charged up the slope. Soldiers in the stockade rained arrows and managed to repel the rebel forces. The Prince of Chu saw the situation was unfavorable and he withdrew the troops immediately and set up camp at the foot of the mountain.

During evening, YeLu Hongji stood at the side of the cliff, gazing towards south, he saw the campfire in rebel camp was akin to sparkling stars, in the distant there were three fire dragons arriving, but it was actually the rear forces of the rebel army that came to join up with the main army. Hongji was dejected as he was about to enter his tent, the Chancellor of Northern Chancellery came to report: "fifteen thousand troops under subordinate command rushed down the mountain and surrendered to the rebel. Subordinate did not manage his troops well, I deserve to die!" YeLu Hongji waved his hand, shook his head and said: "You cannot be blamed, go back and rest!"

He turned around and saw Xiao Feng was preoccupied with a distant place, he said: "Tomorrow morning, the rebels will be victorious, I will definitely become their prisoner. I am the emperor, I cannot be humiliated by these rebels, I will commit suicide to repay my country. Brother, you should

take advantage of the darkness and escape. You have strong martial arts, the rebels will not be able to stop you.” As he said this, his expression became sorrowful, he continued: “I intended to make you rich and influential, but as it turns out I can’t even save myself and I even drag you into this mess.”

Xiao Feng said: “Brother, a real man should be adaptable to circumstances, today this battle is unfavorable, I can guarantee your escape, you should go back reassemble your army and fight again.”

Hongji shook his head and said: “I can’t even save my mother and wife, how can I be considered a real man? In the eyes of the Khitan, the victor is the hero, the loser is the rebel. I suffered a crushing defeat, how can I fight again? Forget me, escape by yourself!”

Xiao Feng knew he spoke the truth and sighed: “That being the case, I will accompany brother and fight the rebels till death. We are sworn brothers, you are maybe the emperor, or even a lowly commoner, but Xiao Feng only treat you as my brother. When elder brother is in trouble, I should face it with you and we live or die together, where is the logic in running away by myself?”

YeLu Hongji was teeming with tears, he held both his hands and said: “Good Brother, I thank you.”

Xiao Feng went back to his tent, he saw AhZi lying curled in the corner of the tent, her big pair of eyes was open, she did not sleep. AhZi said: “Brother-in-law, do you blame me?” Xiao Feng was puzzled: “Blame you for what?” AhZi replied: “It’s all my fault, if I did not insist on coming to this grass plain, you will not get trap in this situation. Brother-in-law, we will really die here correct? “

The torch’s light outside the tent reflected off her face, a shade of red floated up her pale complexion, she looked even more petite and delicate. Xiao Feng felt his pity rising and he said softly: “Why would I blame you? If I did not injure you, we would never have come to this place.” AhZi

smiled and said: "If I did not attack you with the poison needle, you will not have injured me."

Xiao Feng extended his hands and stroke her hair. After being injured for such a long time, AhZi lost more than half of her hair, her hair was sparse and yellowing. Xiao Feng gave a sigh: "You are so young, yet you have to suffer along with me." AhZi said: "Brother-in-law, originally I did not understand why my sister loves you so much, but now I know."

Xiao Feng thought: "Your sister treated me with boundless devotion, what would a little girl like you understand. In fact, I don't even know why AhZhu feel in love with the crude me, how do you even know?" As he thought of this matter, he shook his head in sorrow.

AhZi turned her head to the side and said: "Brother-in-law, have you guessed it, why did I attack you with the poison needle that day? I did not want to kill you, I only wanted to immobilize you so that I can take care of you." Xiao Feng was curious: "What is so good about that?" AhZi smiled and said: "If you are immobilized then you cannot leave me. Otherwise, since you despise me, you might abandon me anytime and not pay any attention to me anymore."

Although her words can be considered to be childish, but it was also not casual nonsense, he cannot help but be secretly scared, wondering: "Since we are all going to die tomorrow, might as well say a few words to comfort her." He said: "You are really childish, if you really want to follow me, just tell me, I will not refuse."

AhZi eyes brightened, she said happily: "Brother-in-law, once I recovered, I still want to follow you, I will never return to my master's XingXiu Sea again. Don't you dare abandon me."

Xiao Feng knew the trouble she stirred up in XingXiu Sect is no small matter, naturally she wouldn't dare to go back, he smiled and said: "You are the great senior martial sister of

XingXiu Sect, if you don't go back they will be like a group without a leader, then what will they do?" AhZi giggled: "Just let them be confused. I don't care."

Xiao Feng pulled a felt blanket and covered her till below the neck, after he tucked her in, he spread another felt and slept at a separate corner of the tent. The flame outside the tent was flickering, he heard faint crying and knew it came from soldiers who miss their family, everyone knew they would not survive tomorrow's encounter, but they were loyal to the emperor and refused to betray him.

Xiao Feng woke up early in the morning, he asked the room attendant to prepare the horses and to take care of AhZi, knowing his end was near, he ate one pound of mutton and drank three pounds of wine then he walked to the hillside. It was still dark at this time, not long after, the sun rose from the east, the bugle called from within the stockade, clanking sound was heard as the men donned their armor and took up their weapons. Troops set off from the stockade and guarded the various strategic points. Xiao Feng looked into the distance from his high ground, east, south, south-east, the rebel troops came gushing from all three sides. White mist blanketed the distant, he can't even see the end of the rebel's troop formation.

Suddenly the sun ray emerged from the horizon, ten thousand golden ray penetrated the white fog, the mist slowly dispersed, revealing the troops hidden by the mist, suddenly the drums roledl and two yellow flag troops came galloping out, followed closely by the royal emperor uncle and the Prince of Chu, they pointed at the mountain with their horsewhip and started discussing their strategy.

YeLu Hongji led his guards and stood by the hillside, seeing such scenario, he was furious, he took a bow and arrow from one of his guard, draw the bow, and shot towards the Prince of Chu. Watching from the mountain top, it may seem they are not separated far apart, but in fact the distance was several times the range of the arrow, the arrow

did not even reach halfway before running out of power and dropped down.

The Prince of Chu laughed and shouted: “Hongji, you usurp my father’s throne and spent a lot of time as the fake emperor, it’s time to abdicate the throne. Surrender quickly, my father will spare your life, and he will also be pretending to be benevolent and confer you as the royal emperor nephew, how does that sound? Ha ha ha!” These few words were obviously meant to insult Hongji for pretending to be benevolent by making YeLu ZhongYuan the royal emperor uncle.

Hongji was furious: “Shameless traitor, still flaunting and trying to win by dispute.”

The Chancellor of Northern Chancellery shouted: “Subordinate is willing to die for your disgrace! Your Majesty has always shown great kindness to me, and today is the day I repay you. I will lead three thousand troops, we will shout in unison and rush down from the hill.” The three thousand troops were all warriors from the Khitan capital, they were ready to fight to the death, one of them was equivalent to ten men, they shouted and rushed ahead, immediately the enemy was forced to retreat a few li. The Prince of Chu waved his command flag, tens of thousands of cavalry surrounded the troops, their spear and sabre ready, their war cry shook the heaven and earth, flesh and blood flew in all direction. The three thousand troops were gradually killed off, eventually, all of them were killed. The Chancellor of Northern Chancellery killed several more people before committing suicide. Hongji, generals, ministers and Xiao Feng could see all the action from the mountain top, but they were powerless to save him, all of them shed long tears for the display of loyalty by the Chancellor of Northern Chancellery.

The Prince of Chu rode near the hillside and laughed: “Hongji, are you going to surrender or not? What can you do with that little amount of troops you have? Your troops are

all brave warriors of the Liao Empire, why do you want them to accompany you till death? Be a real man, be decisive, surrender or fight, if you know your days is numbered, just commit suicide to thank the heavens, don't sacrifice your soldiers for nothing."

YeLu Hongji gave a long sigh and kept his tears, he said: "This beautiful Empire, I will give it to your father. You are right, we are first cousin, linked by flesh and blood, we should not sacrifice the lives of our Khitan warriors." As he said this, he raised his sabre and directed it towards his neck.

Xiao Feng stretched his arm and seized the sabre, he said: "Brother, if you are an honorable hero, you should die fighting in the battlefield, how can you die by committing suicide?"

Hongji sighed: "Brother, these soldiers followed me for such a long time, I will die for sure, but I cannot bear to see them lose their lives for me."

The Prince of Chu shouted: "Hongji, you still delay in committing suicide?" He pointed his horsewhip directly at Hongji's face, his expression arrogant to the extreme.

As Xiao Feng saw him move closer and closer, he had an idea, he whispered: "Brother, distract him and entertain him with words, I will quietly move closer and shoot him with an arrow."

Knowing his amazing skills, Hongji was overjoyed: "This is extremely good, if you can kill him with an arrow, I will die contented." Immediately he raised his voice and shouted: "Prince of Chu, I did not mistreat you and your father, your father wants to be the emperor, but he should not kill and injure so many officers and innocent citizens and weaken the Liao Empire."

Xiao Feng took a hard bow, a few jagged tooth arrows, pulled a horse and slowly guided it to the hill side, he bent down and hide under the horse's belly, his feet hooked onto the horseback, giving a kick with his toes, the horse rushed



off. The rebel army saw a rider-less horse, they knew this horse broke from its reins and escaped, such matter was very common and no one paid extra attention to it. But after a while the rebel army noticed someone hiding under the belly of the horse and they immediately shouted out.

Xiao Feng used his toes to kick the horse, and it galloped straight towards the Prince of Chu, seeing that he was around two hundred footsteps away from him, he drew his bow from under the horse's belly and shot an arrow towards him. The personal guard of the Prince of Chu raised his shield and warded off the arrow. Xiao Feng mounted the horse and galloped quickly, he fired arrows in rapid succession, the first arrow toppled the guard and the second arrow went straight towards the Prince of Chu's chest.

The Prince of Chu deftly waved his whip and strikes the arrow. This art of using the whip to strike an arrow was the Prince's most proficient skill, but the person who shot this arrow had extremely strong muscular strength, in addition the arrow was infused with internal energy, although the whip hit the arrow's shaft, it only diverted the arrow slightly, with a "Bu" sound, the arrow plunged into his left shoulder. The Prince of Chu gave an "Ah Yo!" call and he leaned on the saddle in pain.

Xiao Feng's arrow arrived again, this time the distance was even closer, the arrow entered his left side and penetrated out from his chest. The Prince of Chu immediately fell off the horseback.

Xiao Feng achieved success with one attempt, and he thought: "Why don't I take this opportunity and shoot that royal emperor uncle dead!

When the Prince of Chu was shot and fell off his horse, the rebel army shouted out loudly, a few hundred arrows was shot towards Xiao Feng's horse, in an instant the horse was hit by two hundred arrow, it became a porcupine horse.

Xiao Feng rolled on the ground and slid below a horse ridden by an officer, he executed his cotton softness skill,

immediately, from under the horse's belly he slid to the underside of another horse, he rolled on the ground and slid to the underside of yet another horse. The rebel troop was unable to fire their arrows, and they tried to pierce him using spears. But Xiao Feng slid to the east and rolled west on the ground, he displayed his skills from the underside of horses. The troops were thrown into confusion, thousands of horses pushed and trampled each other, how can they even pierce him with spears?

The cotton softness skill displayed by Xiao Feng was a common ground fighting skill in the Central Plain. Be it ground-fighting fist, ground-fighting knife, or ground-fighting sword, all these skills require rolling and tumbling maneuvers on the ground, waiting for the perfect opportunity to attack an opponent's underside. Currently he's using it on the battlefield, he moved deftly and avoided the trampling of over a thousand horses' hoofs. He took this time to determine the location of the royal emperor uncle, he rolled straight at him and sent three arrows whizzing towards him.

The bodyguards of the royal emperor uncle had previously seen the Prince of Chu being shot by the arrow and they made preparations against it, three dozen men raised their shield, packed densely layer upon layer they blocked in front of the royal emperor uncle, three clanking sounds were heard and the arrows were knocked down by the shield, Xiao Feng carried ten arrows with him and he had already fired seven of them, he was left with three, seeing the three dozen shields mutually covering each other, it's extremely difficult to shoot the down the guards with just three arrows, and there's no need to even mention shooting the royal emperor uncle. Currently he had penetrated deep within enemy's rank, behind him thousands of soldiers pursued with their spears, in front of him were thousands upon thousands of soldiers and horses, he had already fallen into a hopeless situation. Last time when he fought the

martial artists of Central Plain alone, the opposing side only had around a hundred martial artists and it was already perilous to the extreme, luckily someone saved him and he was able to escape, but currently he's trapped and surrounded by over ten thousand men, how can he escape?

The situation was desperate and he can only risk his life and go all out, he gave an earth rumbling howl and leaped into the air, with a "Hu" sound, he leaped over the three dozen shields, and landed in front of the royal emperor uncle's horse. The royal emperor uncle got a huge shock, he raised his whip and strikes it towards Xiao Feng's face. Xiao Feng slanted his body and leaped again, he landed on the royal emperor uncle's horse saddle, his left hand seized the back of the royal emperor uncle and lifted him high up in the air, he shouted: "You want to live or die? Tell everyone to put down their weaponry!" The royal emperor uncle was scared stiff, the words did not register in him.

The hustle and bustle among rebel troops was deafening, thousands of soldier drew and raised their bow, pointing it at Xiao Feng, but with the royal emperor uncle in his hand, nobody dared to act rashly.

Xiao Feng gathered energy into his dantian and shouted: "The royal emperor's orders, all soldiers lay down your weapon and listen to his edict. The emperor is gracious, he will pardon all soldiers, no one will be held accountable." His few words overshadowed the disturbance made by over ten thousand troops, more than half of the ten thousand soldiers in front and behind the mountain heard him clearly.

Xiao Feng have experience in such matters as he was betrayed by members of the Beggar Clan, he understood the thoughts of rebels, once adversity is over, the most important thing is to exempt all crimes, he only need to guarantee that he will forget past grievances and not pursue the matter, the rebel's will to fight back will then disappear. At this moment the rebel army had overwhelming numbers, YeLu Hongji only had around seventy to eighty thousand

troops, it's a miserable minority against an overwhelming majority, definitely not a match against the rebel army, the situation was critical and he did not have time to consult Hongji, and thus he said those few words to make the rebels stop worrying.

Once the words transmitted across the battlefield, the clamor of the rebels quieten down immediately, they looked at each other, everyone was apprehensive and undecided.

Xiao Feng knew the situation was dangerous, if one person from the rebel army voice out his refusal, countless men would blindly follow and the situation would change radically, the situation really does not allow for a moment of delay, he quickly shouted: "The Emperor's decree: Regardless of your rank in the rebel army, all of you are innocent, the emperor is merciful, he will not pursue this matter. All soldiers will be restored to your former post, quickly put down your weapons now!"

Silence ensued, suddenly there was a few "Clank" "Clank" sound, and several men threw down their spears. This sound was infectious, immediately, the "Clank" "Clank" sound grew louder as over half of the soldiers threw down their weapons, the remaining soldiers that held onto their weapons were still hesitating.

Xiao Feng lifted the royal emperor uncle high up in the air with his left arm and his horse move slowly up the mountain, none of the rebels dared to block him, wherever his horse went, the crowd will part and allowed a path through.

Xiao Feng rode his horse and arrived halfway up the hill, two troops from the stockade came to greet him, drum beat and music can be heard from the mountain peak.

Xiao Feng said: "Royal Emperor Uncle, order your subordinate to surrender and throw down their weapons, we will then spare your life."

The royal emperor uncle quivered: "You will really spare my life?"

Xiao Feng looked down the hill, he saw countless rebels still holding onto their bows and spears, the troop's morale was uncertain, the danger had not yet past, he pondered: "Our top priority is to reassure the troops. The royal emperor uncle life and death is of no concern, we only need to send guards to watch over him strictly, he won't be able to commit any evil in the future." He replied: "This is the only opportunity for you to redeem yourself. His Majesty knows this incident is caused by your son, he can pardon your life."

The royal emperor uncle originally did not have any intention to seize the throne, it was all because of his son, the Prince of Chu's wild ambition that led to the current misfortune, since he's already captured he can only hope that his life would be spared, he replied: "Ok, I will do as you say!"

Xiao Feng let him sit comfortably on the saddle, he said loudly: "All troops please listen, the royal emperor uncle has something to say."

The royal emperor uncle said loudly: "The Prince of Chu brought about this disaster, now he is dead. The emperor is gracious, he will forgive everyone's sin. All of you quickly drop your weapons and ask the emperor for forgiveness."

Since the royal emperor uncle said it, the rebels were left without a leader, although some troops were still fiercely stubborn, they do not dare disobey his orders, there were "Clanking" sounds and all the rebels cast down their weapons.

Xiao Feng brought the royal emperor uncle up the mountain. YeLu Hongji was overjoyed, it was as if he is dreaming, he quickly rushed beside Xiao Feng, holding both his hands he said: "Brother, Brother, elder brother's country, I will share it with you together." He was in a very agitated state, tears flowed freely.

The royal emperor uncle knelt on the ground and said: "The dissident ask Your Majesty for forgiveness and seek

Your Majesty's pity."

YeLu Hongji was in an extremely good mood, he said to Xiao Feng: "Brother, what is your opinion?" Xiao Feng replied: "The rebels have overwhelming numbers, the priority now is to stabilize the troop's morale, I beseech Your Majesty to pardon your uncle so that everyone can set their mind at rest."

YeLu Hongji smiled and said: "Good, good, I will do as you say, I will do as you say." He turned towards the Lord of Northern Chancellery and said: "Pass down the imperial edict, Xiao Feng is conferred as the Prince of Chu, his official rank is the Lord of Southern Chancellery, he will lead the rebel army and return back to the capital."

Xiao Feng had a huge shock, he killed the Prince of Chu, captured the royal emperor uncle, all to save his brother's life, he did not covet after prestige or official rank, YeLu Hongji conferred such a high rank on him and he was momentarily at a loss, he did not know what to say. The Lord of Northern Chancellery cupped his hand and said to Xiao Feng: "Congratulations, Congratulations! The noble title of Prince of Chu have never been conferred on non-royals, Lord Xiao quickly thank the emperor." Xiao Feng said to Hongji: "Brother, today's matter is all due to your great fortune, the enemy soldiers lost their spirit and we were able to calm the rebels down, I only contributed a little, it's not something praiseworthy. Moreover, I do not know how to be an official and I don't want to be one, I beseech Brother to withdraw your order." YeLu Hongji gave a laugh, stretched out his right hand to hug his shoulder and said: "The title of Prince of Chu and the official rank of Lord of Southern Chancellery, this is the highest position in my Liao Empire, if Brother still think it's insufficient and still refuse to submit to me, then I can only give up the throne and pass it to you."

Xiao Feng was shocked, he thought: "In his joyous state, Brother can get carried away and not know what he is saying, everything is still a mess, we have to settle things

quickly and not hesitate to prevent any disaster from happening.” He knelt down and said: “Subordinate Xiao Feng receives your order, I thank Your Majesty for bestowing kindness on me.” YeLu Hongji smiled and propped him up with both hands. Xiao Feng said: “Subordinate don’t dare to defy your orders, I can only accept this title and rank. But I am an uneducated peasant, unfamiliar with court regulations, I beg Your Majesty forgiveness if I make any mistake.”

YeLu Hongji stretched his hands and slapped his shoulder several times, smiling: “It doesn’t matter at all!” He turned around and said to the general of the left army YeLu MoGe: “I am making you the Chancellor of Southern Chancellery, you will assist Lord Xiao and handle all Chancellerys’ affair.” YeLu MoGe was overjoyed, he knelt down to thank the emperor and then paid homage to Xiao Feng: “Paying my respect to Lord Xiao!” Hongji said:” MoGe, you will receive Lord Xiao’s orders and lead the rebels back to the capital. We will go and pay our respect to the Empress Dowager.”

Music played out on the mountain peak, YeLu Hongji and the group walked down the mountain path. The rebel lead general had promptly released the Empress Dowager and Empress and made arrangement for them to rest in camp. YeLu Hongji entered the tent and reunited with his mother and wife, they had a narrow escape, it was as if they have been given a second life, naturally everyone praised Xiao Feng for his deeds.

YeLu MoGe led Xiao Feng to meet all his subordinate of Southern Chancellery. Moments earlier, Xiao Feng was alone against ten thousands of troops, such courage was unheard of and everyone witnessed it with their own eyes. The troops and officials of Southern Chancellery were former subordinates of the Prince of Chu, but firstly, after the awe-inspiring display of invincible might by Xiao Feng, everyone was secretly afraid and nobody dare disobey, they also respected his heroic spirit, secondly, the Prince of Chu

usually had a bad temper and never showed kindness to anyone and nobody was loyal to him, thirdly, all of them took part in the rebellion and they felt terrified in their hearts, when Xiao Feng arrived, all the rebels were filled with deep respect and they listened to his orders.

Xiao Feng said: "The emperor has pardoned everyone's crimes for staging this rebellion, from now on, everyone should make a clean break with the past, you should never have the slightest bit of disloyalty again."

A white bearded general said: "Reporting to my Lord, the royal emperor uncle and his son detained my family members and coerced me to revolt, if I refuse, they will decapitate my family members immediately, I had no other choice, I beseech my Lord to clarify this matter with the emperor."

Xiao Feng nodded and said: "Since this is the case, I shall not pursue past matters anymore." He turned around and said to YeLu MoGe: "The troops will rest here, once they have eaten their fill, pack up and return to the capital."

Immediately, based on their ranks, the subordinates of Southern Chancellery came one by one to pay their respects to the new Lord. Although Xiao Feng has never been an official, but he has long been the Beggar Clan's leader, he has his own way of commanding and leading the crowd. In fact, there was not much difference in leading beggar clan members or Khitan warriors. The only difference was that Liao army have their own set of rules and norm, Xiao Feng was careful to remember it and he also have the assistance of YeLu MoGe, and thus everything went perfectly.

Not long after Xiao Feng led the army and set off, the Empress Dowager and Empress sent their messengers bearing gowns, belts, gold and silver to be gifted to the army. Xiao Feng expressed his gratitude, and the attendant protecting AhZi also arrived. She was wearing silk gown and riding a gallant horse, both gifted by the Empress Dowager. Xiao Feng saw her small body was wrapped in that large



gown, half her face was obscured by the gown's collar, and he cannot help but find it funny.

AhZi did not personally witness Xiao Feng kill the Prince of Chu with an arrow or capture the royal emperor uncle alive, she only heard it from the attendants. When recounting past events, people tend to spice up the story and make it more dramatic, and thus Xiao Feng's achievements became even more miraculous by three notch. As AhZi saw him, she complained: "Brother-in-law, you achieved such great feats, why didn't you tell me, otherwise I would have stood by the hillside and look at how you kill them all, won't I be happier? You even made me worried for half a day." Xiao Feng said: "I was lucky to claim such credits, how would I know in advance? You start saying childish words once we meet." AhZi said: "Brother-in-law, come over here."

Xiao Feng approached her, he saw her pale face glowing with excitement, complemented by the beautiful gown she was wearing, she looked like a baby doll, she looked boney yet cute, and he cannot help but laugh.

AhZi gave an angry look and complained: "I am telling you a serious matter, but you kept laughing, what is so funny?" Xiao Feng laughed and said: "Seeing you wear that over-size gown, you look like a baby doll, very interesting." AhZi fumed: "You always treat me like a child and now you make fun of me." Xiao Feng laughed and said: "No, no! AhZi, I thought both of us will die for sure, who knew we actually made it through, naturally I am very happy. Whatever Lord of Southern Chancellery, or the title of Prince of Chu, I don't give a damn, it will be fine as long as we can survive and live."

AhZi said: "Brother-in-law, you are also afraid of dying?" Xiao Feng nod and said: "In the face of danger, naturally I am afraid of death, there are tens of thousands of troops, you dare to rush out alone? This is called confront a person

with the danger of death and he will fight to live. If I don't rush out, I will die for certain. It cannot be said that I am brave, but it is the will to fight of a cornered beast. If you surround a bear or tiger and refuse to let it escape, then it will naturally fight for its life and claw or maul you." AhZi smiled and said: "You compared yourself with wild beasts."

Both of them rode side by side on the horses, they looked at their surroundings, flags were fluttering on the grass plain, long line of troops marching forward, all these stretch across the horizon and they can't even see the end, bodyguards protected them in all four directions.

AhZi was very happy and said: "That day, you help me become the head disciple of the XingXiu Sect, from the hundreds of second and third generation members, apart from master, I can be considered to be the most senior, I was extremely pleased with myself. But it is really nothing compared to the thousands of troops you now command. Brother-in-law, the Beggar Clan does not want you as their leader, heng, who gives a damn about that small clan? Why don't you lead your men and exterminate all of them."

Xiao Feng shook his head and said: "Childish words! I am a Khitan, the Beggar Clan is correct in refusing to let me continue to be their leader. Members of the Beggar Clan are all my former subordinates and friends, how can I exterminate them?"

AhZi replied: "They kick you out of the clan, and they mistreated you, naturally you should kill them all. Brother-in-law, do they treat you as their friend?"

Xiao Feng found it difficult to reply, he only shook his head, he thought of JuXian Manor where he broke off all ties with his old friends, his heroic spirit disappeared.

AhZi again questioned: "If they know that you have become the Lord of Southern Chancellery of Liao Empire, and they suddenly become remorseful and ask you to become their clan leader again, will you agree?" Xiao Feng gave a slight smile and said: "The heroes of Great Song

treats all Khitans as wicked villains who commit all sorts of extreme atrocities, the higher my official position, the more they hate me.” AhZi said: “Pei! Who gives a damn? They hate you, we can also hate them.”

Xiao Feng looked south into the distant, he saw the mountains overlapping at the horizon, he pondered: “I will reach Central Plains once I cross those mountains.” Although he was a Khitan, but he grew up in Central Plains, in his heart he loved the Great Song more than Liao Empire, if the Beggar Clan let him become a member without any official duty, an empty-pouch disciple, he will feel more at ease than becoming the Lord of Southern Chancellery.

AhZi said: “Brother-in-law, the emperor is really smart, he made you the Lord of Southern Chancellery. In the future when Liao Empire fights war, you will lead the troops and be victorious in every battle. You only need to burst into the enemy ranks and kill the enemy marshal, the troops will then throw down their weapon and surrender, won’t the battle be won?”

Xiao Feng laughed: “The subordinates of the royal emperor uncle are soldiers of Liao Empire, they have always followed the orders of the emperor, thus when the Prince of Chu died, and the royal emperor uncle got captured, everyone surrendered. It will be different if two countries are at war. If you kill the marshal, there will still be a deputy marshal, kill the main general, and there will still be other generals, the battle will be fought till the last men. My single effort will be powerless in such situation.”

AhZi nodded and said: “En, so that’s how it is. Brother-in-law, you said you are not considered brave when you rush into enemy rank, killed the Prince of Chu and captured the royal emperor uncle. Then in your entire life, what is the most courageous thing you ever did? Can you tell me?”

Xiao Feng never like to narrate his proudest and bravest achievements, when he was still in the Beggar Clan, he killed all kinds of traitors and evil people, no matter how

fierce the fight, once he return back to the clan he will brush it aside and simply say: "The certain person has been killed." As for all the thrilling details and hash encounters, regardless of how others probe him, he will never say a single word more. As he listened to AhZi's question, he thought of how he had fought over hundreds of battles in his life, how he did not back down in the face of enemy and all the numerous brave deeds, he really cannot bear to say it out and thus he replied: "I was forced to battle with enemies, I really have no other choice, it cannot be said that I am brave."

AhZi said: "But I know. The most courageous thing you did was the ferocious battle at Juxian manor."

Xiao Feng was dazed and asked: "How do you know?"

AhZi said: "That day at the Lakeside mirror, once you left, Father, Mother, and the subordinates of my father, we all talked about you, all of us admired your martial arts to no end, later you went to the hero's feast at Juxian Manor and single-handedly fought all the heroes, all just to seek treatment for a single lady. This lady is naturally my sister. They don't know that AhZhu is the daughter of father and mother, they say you were ruthless and cruel in killing your foster parent and master, but you treated the lady with unexpected faithfulness; You were ungrateful, cruel and a pervert, an unreasonable bastard." As she said this she started laughing.

Xiao Feng murmured: "Hei, 'Ungrateful! Cruel and a pervert!', the heroes of Central Plain gave this kind of comments to Xiao Feng"

AhZi consoled him: "You don't have to be upset. My mother praised you greatly, she says that as long as a man is faithful, he is a good man, it doesn't matter what he does, she says my father is also ungrateful, cruel and a pervert, he lusted after many lovers, and his daughters are cruel and ruthless, it cannot be compared to you. You should stand

aside and clap in approval.” Xiao Feng smiled and shook his head.

The army travelled for a few days and they reached the capital. Common citizens and officials living in the capital have already been given advance notice, all of them came out to welcome him, Xiao Feng’s command flag was displayed everywhere, the people burned incense and bowed down to praise him endlessly. With his single action he calmed the disaster and saved countless lives of Liao Empire, over half the citizens in the capital had members from their family serving in the army, naturally they felt grateful towards him. Xiao Feng pressed his bridle and rode on, the citizens cried out: “We thank Lord Xiao for saving our lives! Heaven will protect the Lord of Southern Chancellery so that he may have a long and healthy life, and enjoy great riches and fortune!”

Xiao Feng listened to the voices paying tribute to him, the citizens were all on the verge of tears, their gratitude and appreciation was indeed sincere and heartfelt, he pondered: “A person who holds high ranking position, every move he make will affect the lives of thousands of people, when I shot the arrow and killed the Prince of Chu, I only did it at a fleeting moment of bravery, I saved my brother, I saved myself, but I didn’t know it also benefited countless citizens. Sigh, I tried to do good in the Central Plain, but I only received resentment and slander, I became the number one evil in the martial art world, such thing is really hard to explain.”

He thought again: “This is the country of my parent, when they were still alive, my father and mother must have walked on this road before. Sigh, I don’t know what my parent looks like, I can’t even imagine how they rode side by side on a horse.”

The Liao Empire was the world’s largest nation, it was far more powerful and prosperous than Great Song. But the

Khitan lived a nomadic life, they keep on migrating, the houses and shops in the capital are crude and primitive, it really cannot be compared with those at Central Plains.

The caretaker of the Southern Chancellery welcomed Xiao Feng into his official residence, it was a grand mansion, the furnishings were unusually grand and splendid. Xiao Feng lived a life of poverty, how would he even get a chance to live in such mansion? As he walked one time around the mansion, he felt uncomfortable, he ordered his subordinates to erect two tents in the army barracks, he and AhZi each occupied one tent, their everyday lives were simple, just like former times.

On the third day, YeLu Hongji, the Empress Dowager, Empress, concubines, princess and the captured family members of the army, all returned to the capital. The royal emperor uncle was too ashamed of his deeds and committed suicide along the way. Hongji also kept his promise, he did not pursue the crimes of the rebels, he only executed twenty chief culprits under the Prince of Chu who instigated the rebellion. A grand feast was held in the Palace for three days to reward the troops who remain loyal and fought at the stockade. Xiao Feng became the number one hero at the feast. YeLu Hongji, the Empress Dowager, Empress, concubines and princess all bestowed gifts, in addition to the gifts by government officials and army officers, the gifts piled as high as a mountain.

Once the reward was complete, Xiao Feng returned to the Southern Chancellery to supervise affairs. Dozens tribe chiefs in Liao Empire all came to pay their respects, the Crow tribe, Morality tribe, North tribe, South tribe, Shiwei tribe, Ancient Plum tribe, Five Nation tribe, WuLa tribe, etc. Followed by army officers under the command of the Empress, Great Tranquil Palace, Eternal Happiness Palace, Accumulation Palace, Prosperous Palace and various officers from other Palaces. Liao Empire was made up of fifty nine countries, the TuYuHun, Turkey, Tangut, ShaTuo, Persia,

DaShi, Urghur, Tibet, GaoChang, Korea, YuQu, Dunhuang, etc. All these countries have their envoys in the capital, once they learned that Xiao Feng carried the most weight, and have the highest authority over the armed forces, they all came bearing rare gifts to curry favors with him. Xiao Feng had to meet guests and subordinates every day, all he saw was endless treasures, and all he ever heard was fabricated flattery and praises.

He was kept occupied for over a month and YeLu Hongji summoned him into the main Palace and said: "Brother, your official post is the Lord of Southern Chancellery, you have to be based in Nanjing and wait for opportunity to conquer Central Plains. As your brother, I do not wish to part with you, but in order to establish an outstanding Empire that last for thousands of generation, it's best if you lead your troops and head down south as soon as possible!"

Xiao Feng heard the emperor ordered him to lead an expedition to conquer south and he was startled, he said: "Your Majesty, this south expedition is an important matter, it's an extremely serious affair. Xiao Feng is only one man, the troops are not ready for this task."

YeLu Hongji laughed: "Our Empire recently met a misfortune, we need time to recuperate our troops. The Great Song is currently governed by their Empress Dowager, they rely heavily on Sima Guang to manage state affairs, there is no weakness to take advantage of, we cannot conquer south at this moment. Brother, once you are at Nanjing, you have to constantly keep the matter of annexing the Song in your mind. We will only move in when there is internal dispute, if you notice any turn of events, lead all your troops and conquer south. If there is nothing wrong with their internal affairs and we forcefully invade, we will waste much effort and reap less benefit."

Xiao Feng replied: "Yes, this should be the way." Hongji said: "But how do we know if the Song is being governed properly, or if the citizens are really willing to submit?" Xiao

Feng said: "Your Majesty please enlighten me." Hongji laugh and said: "This have always been the norm, use gold and silver to bribe spies. The south people are greedy, there are many despicable and shameless people, order your Chancellor to spare no expense in giving treasure, bribe as many people as you can."

Xiao Feng accepted the orders and left the Palace, his heart was troubled. He has always been associated with heroes and brave men, the martial world was dark and dangerous, he has seen plenty of schemes that involves setting ambush and putting poison, these schemes were straight forward and direct in killing people but he has never tried to use gold and silver in bribing people. Besides, although he was a citizen of Liao Empire, but he grew up in Southern Song, the emperor gave him the mission to conquer the Song, but he was extremely reluctant to carry it out, he pondered: "Brother made me the Lord of Southern Chancellery, it's his way of showing how he valued our brotherhood. If I resign from my post now, I will fail to live up to his great kindness and damage our brotherly ties. I should go to Nanjing first and wait for a year or so, I will then ask for resignation. If by then he does not approve, I will simply slip away and escape, there's nothing he can do to hold me back." Immediately he led his subordinates and brought along AhZi and they went to Nanjing.

The Nanjing of Liao Empire is also known as Beijing (China) in modern times. At that time it was known as Yanjing, also known as Youdou, the capital of You Province. After Shi JingTang declared himself emperor, he gained the full support of Liao Empire, Shi JingTang then ceded sixteen prefectures to Liao as repayment. The sixteen prefectures are You, Ji, Zhuo, Shun, Tan, Ying, Mo, Xin, Gui, Ru, Wu, Wei, Yun, Ying, HouZhou, the Song Dynasty fought three generations for it but they never manage to recover the land. The sixteen prefectures occupied strategic positions, the Liao Empire stationed large number of troops there,



every time they attack Southern Song, they can push in deep and the Song did not have any strategic points for defense. Song and Liao have fought for over one hundred years, the Song only won once, it's not because of soldiers or equipment, but due to the strategic position occupied by the Liao which allows them to gain huge advantage and control the battlefield.

Xiao Feng and his party arrived within the city, the street of Nanjing city was wide, markets and restaurants bustled with activities, it's far superior to the capital, the passersby were all people from Southern Song, and all he heard were chats in language of Central Plains, it was as if he returned back to Central Plains. Both Xiao Feng and AhZi liked it very much, the next day they dressed simply and blended with the crowd, they toured and explored the markets and streets.

The city Yanjing (Nanjing) spanned thirty six li, there were a total of eight gates. To the east is Safe Eastern Gate and Winter Jasmine Gate; South was Rising Sun Gate and Red Phoenix Gate; West was Illustrious West Gate and Tranquil Gate; North was Connecting Heaven Gate and Encircle Vibration Gate. The reason why the north gates were known as Connecting Heaven, and Encircle Vibration, was to signify unshakable allegiance to Liao and to obey the decree of the emperor. The residence of the Lord of Southern Chancellery was southwest of the city. Xiao Feng and AhZi explored the city for half a day, but there were endless city squares, shrines, temples, government offices, and they could not possibly finish exploring them all in such a short time.

Xiao Feng's official post was the Lord of Southern Chancellery, the sixteen prefectures naturally came under his jurisdiction, even the DaTong prefecture in the west region and DaDing prefecture in the central region were all under his command. The prestige and power he holds was heavy, it's not feasible for him to continue living in a small

tent, and thus he was forced to live in his official residence. After supervising the work for a few days, he felt fatigued and light-headed, he was feeling extremely bitter, he saw his Chancellor YeLu MoGe was intelligent and capable, skilled in managing government affairs, and thus he delegated all the work to YeLu MoGe.

Regardless, there were numerous perks that come with his high official post, there was unlimited supply of precious tonic and medicines in the Lord's residence, AhZi can simply eat medicine for all three meals and her injuries recovered day by day, on early winter, she can finally walk by herself. She toured Yanjing city many times, assisted by an attendant, she also explored ten li outside the city.

On this day the weather was clear, AhZi wore a mink coat and came to Xiao Feng's residence and said: "Brother-in-law, I am bored staying in the city, accompany me to go hunting."

After staying for such a long time in the Chancellery Xiao Feng was also bored, after listening to her proposal he was excited, immediately he ordered his subordinates to prepare the horses for the hunting trip. He disliked hunting with a large-scale party, and thus he only took a few attendants to take care of AhZi, he feared the citizens might make a big fuss when they see him so he changed into sheepskin robes worn by common soldiers, he carried a bow and a bag of arrows, he rode a horse, along with AhZi they exited the Tranquil Gate and galloped west.

The hunting party travelled ten li away from the city, and they only hunted a few small rabbits. Xiao Feng said: "Let's try heading towards south." He turned his horse and rode towards south, again they travelled for over twenty li, suddenly they saw a river deer running across. AhZi took out her bow and arrow and pulled the bowstring, but it turns out that her arm did not contain any strength, she can't draw the bow at all. Xiao Feng's left hand reach out behind her and gripped the bow, his right hand grasped her hand and

they pulled the bowstring, once they released the string, there was a “Sou” sound and an arrow flew out, the deer was hit and collapsed immediately. Everyone cheered.

Xiao Feng released his grip and smiled at AhZi, but he saw tears brimming in her eyes, curious he asked: “What happen? You don’t like me to help you shoot the wild animal?” Tears flowed down AhZi’s cheek and she said: “I ... I became a disabled person, such a light bow...I can’t even draw it.” Xiao Feng consoled her: “Don’t be so impatient, your strength will return slowly. If in the future it still does not return, I’ll teach you internal energy cultivation method, it will definitely increase your strength.” AhZi smiled through her tears and said: “You must keep your promise, you will definitely teach me internal energy cultivation.” Xiao Feng replied: “Yes, Yes, I will definitely teach you.”

As he was speaking, suddenly the sound of horse’s hoof came from the south, a large troop came galloping on the snow covered ground. Xiao Feng gazed towards the direction where the sound came from, the troops were all Liao soldiers, yet they were striking their banners. The troops were clamoring and singing, apparently they were celebrating, many captives were tied to the back of their horses, it seemed they just returned from a victorious battle. Xiao Feng pondered: “We are not waging war with anyone, what battle did they return from?” Seeing the troops head east and returning to the city, he said to his subordinate: “You go ask that group of people, what are they doing here?”

His subordinate replied: “Affirmative!” he rode towards the troop and said: “Brothers have you returned from raiding the common people?”

He reached the troop and they exchanged a few words. The troop heard that the Lord of Southern Chancellery is here, they cheered loudly, dismounted from their horses and guided it, they quickly walked towards Xiao Feng, bowed down and saluted, they chorused in unison: “Long live Your Highness!”

Xiao Feng raised his hand and returned the greeting, he said: "Dispense the formality!" He saw there were about eight hundred soldiers, their horses carried silk clothes and various artefacts, the horses were also pulling seven hundred to eight hundred captives, mostly young women, some juvenile men, all wearing Song attire, all of them weeping and wailing.

The captain of the troop said: "Today it's our HeiLaDu troops turn to raid the common people, owing to Your Highness' good fortune, we had a good raid." He turned his back and said: "Everyone bring out the best looking young girl, the best treasures and offer it, we invite His Highness to pick and use." The troops replied: "Affirmative!" They dragged twenty young ladies towards Xiao Feng and piled various ornaments on a felt sheet. The troops gazed at Xiao Feng, their eyes filled with respect and hope, it would be their greatest honor if the Lord of Southern Chancellery accepts the women and ornaments.

On the day Xiao Feng was at Yanmen Gate, he saw soldiers of Great Song capturing Khitan's citizens, and now it's the soldiers of Liao capturing citizens of Great Song, the captives expression were miserable, no different from prisoners. The Liao Empire does not supply rations to troops, nor do they pay salary to troops, all the needs of the troops have to be robbed from the enemy, they send troops daily to Great Song, Western Xia, Jurchen, Korea, and various neighboring countries to rob the citizens, the act was termed "Beating The Grass Valley", in fact, it's no different from common robberies. To retaliate, troops from Great Song raid the citizens of Liao and they termed it "Beating The Standing Valley". Thus citizens living near the borders suffered extra hardships, they live in fear daily, not knowing if they will get to see the next morning. Xiao Feng always felt the method was cruel and immoral, he did not intend to serve for long as an official, he's only humoring YeLu Hongji for a while before resigning and living in seclusion, thus he

did not interfere or make a strong stand in the country's affairs, as he witnessed the miserable plight of the captives, he cannot help but feel sad and asked: "This raid....where did you carry out this raid?"

The captain said respectfully: "Reporting to your Highness, we raided outside the ZhuoZhou region, near the borders of Great Song. After the arrival of your Highness, subordinates dare not raid the regions near here for provisions."

Xiao Feng thought: "Listening to his words, it seems they used to raid the Song citizens here." He advanced his horse and spoke in Chinese: "Where are you from?" A maiden knelt down and cried: "I am from the Zhang village, I beg your Highness for mercy, release me and let me reunite with my parents." Xiao Feng raised his head and looked at the rest of the people. Hundreds of captives all knelt down, only one juvenile man stood upright and refused to kneel.

The youth was around sixteen years old, his face elongated, with a tapered chin, his expression was wavering and uncertain, Xiao Feng asked: "Boy, where do you live?" The youth replied: "I have an important secret, I have to tell you face to face." Xiao Feng said: "Fine, come over and tell me." The hand of the youth was bound by thick ropes, he said: "Please move away from your subordinates, this matter cannot be heard by others." Xiao Feng's curiosity was piqued and he pondered: "Such a young boy, what kind of important secret he holds? Yes, he came from the south, he may have information pertaining to the military movements in Great Song." The boy was a citizen of Song, by revealing secrets to Khitan, he will be a shameless traitor, Xiao Feng scorned such people but since the boy said he holds important secrets, there's no harm in listening, he rode forward ten zhang and beckoned: "Come over here!"

The boy followed, raising his hands he said: "Please cut the ropes binding my hands, I wish to present an item I kept in my bosom." Xiao Feng unsheathed his sabre and chopped

straight ahead, the force in this chop was sufficient to split the boy in half, but the sabre's positioning was extremely accurate, it only cut the ropes binding the boy's hands. The youth had a huge shock, he retreated two steps, and gazed blankly at Xiao Feng. Xiao Feng smiled, sheathed his sabre, and asked: "What is the item?"

The youth stuck his hands into his bosom, felt the item and said: "You will know once you see it." And he walked towards Xiao Feng. Xiao Feng stretched out his hand to receive it.

Suddenly, the youth threw the item fiercely at Xiao Feng's face. Xiao Feng waved his whip and struck down the item, white powder came flying out, the item was just a small cloth bag. The bag fell on the floor and white powder spilled out of the bag, it was quicklime. This shameless item was used by despicable thieves in the martial world, if the powder landed on a person's face, the quicklime will irritate the eyes and the person will eventually be blinded forever.

Xiao Feng groaned and pondered: "This boy is bold, it seems he's not a traitor." He nodded his head and said: "What is your name? Why do you seek to harm me?" The boy closed his lips firmly and did not answer. Xiao Feng said in an amiable manner: "Just tell me the truth, I will spare your life." The youth said: "I failed in taking revenge for my parents, what is left to say." Xiao Feng said: "Who is your parents? Did I really kill them?"

The youth took two steps forward, his expression full of grief and anger, pointing to Xiao Feng he shouted loudly: "Qiao Feng! You killed my father, mother and my uncle, I... I can't wait to eat your meat, skin you and remove your tendon, dismember you into pieces!"

Xiao Feng listened to the boy used his old name, "Qiao Feng", and that he killed his parents and uncle, it must be former enemies from Central Plains, he asked: "Who is your uncle? Who is your father?"

The boy replied: "Since I don't want to live anymore, I will let you know, the men from You family of JuXian village are not afraid of death."

Xiao Feng made an "Oh!" sound and said: "So you are the nephew of the You brothers, your father is You Ju, Second Master You, right?" He paused for a while and continued: "That day I was surrounded by numerous heroes in the manor, I was forced to fight, it was not something within my control. Your father and uncle died by committing suicide." As he said this he shook his head and continued: "Sigh, they lost their shield and this forced them to commit suicide. What is your name?"

The boy straightened his body, and said loudly: "I am called You TanZhi, I don't need you to kill me, I will follow my uncle and father good example!" His right hand reached into his trouser and took out a short-knife, he plunged it at his chest. Xiao Feng waved his whip, wrapped it around the knife and seized it. You TanZhi was furious and shouted: "I am not even allowed to commit suicide? You damnable Liao dog, aren't you too vicious!"

At this moment, AhZi had reached Xiao Feng's side and she shouted: "You little punk, you dare to insult people? You want to die? Hehe, it won't be so easy!" Upon seeing such a delicate beautiful lady, You TanZhi was stunned and rendered speechless. AhZi said: "The punk called Zhi, later you will know what it feels like to be blind." She turned and said to Xiao Feng: "Brother-in-law, this kid is so vicious, he tried to harm you with quicklime, we will use this quicklime to blind both his eyes before deciding how to deal with him."

Xiao Feng shook his head, he said to the captain of the troops: "The Song captives you captured during the raid, can you give them all to me?" The captain was overjoyed and said: "Your Highness honored me with your presence, I would like to thank your Highness for bestowing kindness." Xiao Feng said: "All those who hand over the captives, go back to my residence and claim your reward." The troops

said happily: "We sincerely dedicate it to your Highness, we do not require reward." Xiao Feng said: "Leave the captives here and return back to the city, remember to claim your rewards." The troops bowed and gave their thanks, the captain said: "There are many wild beasts out here, is your Highness using these Song pigs as live targets? The previous Prince of Chu likes to do this. Unfortunately, we mostly caught aunties and old ladies, they can't run fast. Next time we will catch able-bodied Song pigs for your Highness." He bowed and left with his troops.

"Using these Song pigs as live targets", these words drilled into his ears, Xiao Feng cannot help but feel startled, he could visualize the cruel actions of the previous Prince of Chu: A few hundred Song people howling and running around like wild beasts, the Khitan nobles laughing, drawing their bows, shooting and killing the people one by one. Some Song people fled to the distant, the Khitan will chase with their horses, akin to shooting deer or fox, they will kill every single person. This kind of cruel stuff, the Khitan narrated it as if it was no big deal, it must be a common practice. He looked at the captives, their face yellowed and they shivered under the cold wind. Some of these captives understood Khitan's language, they heard of "Shooting live human targets" before, they are scared out of their wits.

Xiao Feng gave a long sigh, looking south at the layers upon layers of clouds hovering at the mountains, he pondered: "If my parentage was not revealed, today, I will still treat myself as citizen of Great Song. We speak the same language, eat the same food, how am I different from them? Everyone is human, but why do we insist on differentiating Khitan people, Great Song, Jurchen, Korea? You come to my borders to raid, I go to your borders to murder and commit arson? You curse me as Liao dogs? I curse you as Song pigs?" His thoughts kept gushing forth like tidal waves.



Seeing the troops that captured the captives had all left without a trace, he said to the captives: "I'll release you today, run quickly!" The captives thought Xiao Feng was making them run before shooting arrows and killing them, they hesitated and did not move. Xiao Feng said again: "After returning home, move far away from the borders so as not to get captured during the raid. I saved you this time, but I may not be able to save you the next time."

Now the captives believed his words, the applause was thunderous, they knelt down and kowtowed: "The kindness of your Highness is as high as a mountain, we will go back home and pray for your everlasting health and fortune." They knew that once they got captured during the raid, unless they are wealthy people who can bribe with gold and silk, they will surely die without a trace. Song and Liao have been warring for successive years, the wealthy families had long escaped to mainland. All these captives were poor people, where would they find gold and silk to redeem their lives? They knew their fate was far worse than oxen and horses, but this Lord from Liao Empire actually released them back home, they were really overjoyed at this unexpected news.

Xiao Feng saw their happy expression, they helped and supported each other to travel back south, he pondered: "My Khitan people captured and dragged them here, now I release them back, they have to suffer many hardships along the way, how did I show them any kindness?"

The captives gradually walked far away, but You TanZhi was still standing upright, Xiao Feng said: "Why aren't you leaving? You are returning to Central Plains, do you have enough money?" He stretched his hand into his bosom, wanting to give him some gold or silver, but he did not carry any money, but as he felt around he retrieved a small oilcloth bag. Xiao Feng heart soured, contained in this oilcloth bag was a Sanskrit version of Tendon-Changing Sutra, it was stolen by AhZhu from Shaolin Temple, and she

insisted that he kept it, now she was dead but the Sutra was still around, how was it not sad? He promptly kept the oilcloth bag back into his bosom and said: "I don't have any valuables with me now, if you need money, you can follow me back to the city."

You TanZhi said loudly: "The one surnamed Qiao, kill me if you want, cut this act, why disgrace me further with these schemes? Even if I die of poverty, how can I even take a single cent from you?"

Xiao Feng thought his words were correct, he did cause his father's death, there's a saying that one cannot live under the same sky as one's enemy, this hatred cannot be eliminated, it's pointless to argue further, he replied: "I won't kill you! If you want revenge, you are welcome to try anytime."

AhZi said: "Brother-in-law, you can't release him! This kid won't use proper skills when dueling you, he will only use contemptible dirty tricks. You need to destroy the source of trouble so as to avoid future disaster."

Xiao Feng shook his head: "Difficulties are everywhere in the martial world, every step is perilous, but I survive them all. This young man won't be able to harm me. That day I angered his uncle and father into committing suicide, although it is unintentional, but I will always owe this blood debt, why harm the nephew of the You brothers?" As he said this, his enthusiasm dulled and he said: "Let's just go back, there's nothing much to hunt today."

AhZi pouted and thought: "I just had a great idea to torment this boy, it's really interesting! But you insist on releasing him, once I return to the city, what is left to play?" But she dared not defy Xiao Feng's words, she turned her horse and followed Xiao Feng back, after travelling for a few zhang, she turned her head back and said: "Boy, go back and practice your martial arts for one hundred years before you seek revenge from my brother-in-law!" She gave a girlish smile, cracked her whip and galloped off quickly.



## Chapter 28: Vegetation Surviving, Skull Casted in Iron

Fan translation by d4rksinz [Second Edition]

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You TanZhi saw Xiao Feng and his party travelled north, they did not turn back at all, only then was he certain that he won't die, he pondered: "Why did that traitor not kill me? Hmmm, he look down on me, and thought that killing me will dirty his hands. He...he became some kind of Lord in Liao Empire, it would be even more difficult for me to take revenge from now on. But at least I found the whereabouts of this traitor."

He leaned down to pick up the quicklime bag, and went to look for the short-knife thrown aside by Xiao Feng's horsewhip, suddenly he saw an oilcloth bag within the left vegetation, it was the exact same bag retrieved by Xiao Feng from his bosom, he picked it up immediately and opened the bag, inside was a book, he flipped the pages of the book, every page had curvy writings, he did not understand a single word from the writings. When Xiao Feng saw this oilcloth bag he was thinking of someone else, he was absent minded, when he put this Tendon-Changing Sutra back into his bosom he didn't secure it properly, when his horse jolted off, the book just dropped into the vegetation and he didn't realize it at all.

You TanZhi thought to himself: "This is most probably Khitan text. The traitor carried this book with him personally, it must be something greatly valuable to him. I won't return it to him, let him worry about it, which is a good thing." He felt a faint sense of satisfaction of revenge, he put the book back into the oilcloth bag and kept it in his bosom and then travelled south.

At an early age he learnt martial arts from his father, but he had a thin and frail body, and weak muscular strength, he was totally incompatible for the strong and fierce martial arts style of the You brothers, after learning martial arts for three years, his progress was minimal, he can't claim to be the son of a famous martial arts master with his level of skill. As he learn till he was twelve years old, You Ju was dishearten and he discussed with his brother You Ji. Both of them agreed: "Our You family produced this kind of three-legged-cat skill, won't people laugh until their mouth become slanted? Moreover, if people know he's the son and nephew of the Twin-You-Heroes of the JuXian manor, they won't hold back and use their full strength, they will kill him with a single stroke. It would be better to let him study literature so as to preserve his life." Thus from the age of twelve, You TanZhi stopped learning martial arts and You Ju hired a tutor to teach him how to study.

But he did not concentrate while studying, he was always imagining and day dreaming. His teacher said: "Student Zhi, while learning, is it not a pleasure?" He replied: "It depends on what you are learning, Father taught me boxing, I was happy while learning." The teacher fumed: "Confucius was referring to scholarly learning, life's great undertaking, when did he referred to boxing and playing with spears?" You TanZhi replied: "Fine, you curse my father and uncle, you say my father is not a good man because he box and play with spears, I will go tell my father." And he eventually drove the teacher away in anger. This went on and he continually drove all his teachers away in anger, You Ju gave his son several beatings, but he became even more obstinate and mischievous after each beating. You Ju saw his son was unworthy, stubborn and difficult to teach, he was at a loss, he could only give a long sigh and pay no notice. Thus, You TanZhi was eighteen years old now, although he came from a famous family, he was neither proficient in literature nor martial arts. His uncle and father committed suicide, his

mother banged her head on a pillar to die with her husband, he was alone and helpless, and wandered around aimlessly, all he ever thought was to seek Xiao Feng for revenge.

That day at the battle at JuXian manor, he hid behind a screen wall and observed the battle, he saw clearly Qiao Feng's appearance and shape, and heard that he was a Khitan, he was muddle-headed and just went searching north, along the way he saw a petty thief using quicklime to blind his enemy, he felt this was a good method, he copied him and made a quicklime package. He was loitering around the borders when the Khitans captured him during their raid, unexpectedly, he met Xiao Feng, and he even managed to throw the quicklime package, it can be said he's lucky to the extreme.

He pondered: "Right now the most important thing is to escape as far as possible, don't let him capture me. I'll catch a poisonous snake or big centipede, then I will put it on his bed, when he's sleeping the bugs will bite him to death. That young lady ... that young lady, alas, she ... she is so beautiful!"

As he thought of AhZi's appearance. His chest heated up for no reason, and his face felt like an oven, he pondered: "I don't know when I will get to see her pale face, the delicate and elegant young lady."

He hung his head and took big steps, after a while he overtook the group of captives released by Xiao Feng. Some of them invited him to travel with the group but he ignored them and travelled alone. After walking for ten li, his stomach groaned in hunger, he looked around for something to eat, but there was nothing except withered grass and snow on the grass plains, he pondered: "If only I was a cow or sheep, I can eat the grass and drink the snow water, I will be so happy. En, but if I am a little lamb, other people will slaughter my mother and father, the two old lamb, and eat them, then should I take revenge? I cannot live under the same sky as my enemy, of course I have to take revenge.

But how should I do it? Use my two horns to bang those people that killed my parents? But these people rear animals for the purpose of eating them, where is the logic in revenge?"

He was letting his imagination run wild, suddenly he heard the sound of horse's hoof, three Khitan soldiers came riding on horses, once they saw him, there was a rustle sound and they slip a lasso over his neck, they pulled and the rope tighten. You TanZhi could not maintain his footing and fell down, the soldiers dragged him away. You TanZhi gave a few blood-curdling scream, immediately the rope around his neck tightened further and he could not scream anymore.

The Khitan soldiers were afraid the rope might strangle him to death, and they immediately slowed the horse steps. You TanZhi struggled and got up from the ground, he loosened the lasso around his neck. A Khitan soldier gave a strong tug, You TanZhi staggered and almost fell down again. The three Khitan soldiers laughed at him. The soldier holding onto the ropes said a few words to You TanZhi. You TanZhi did not understand Khitan, he shook his head. The soldier waved his hand and the horse moved off again, but this time it did not gallop off quickly. You TanZhi was afraid of being strangled by the ropes and losing his breath, he walked two steps and ran three steps to follow the soldiers.

He saw the three Khitan soldiers heading north, he was afraid: "Qiao Feng only worded it nicely, he said he would release me, but in a blink of an eye he ordered his subordinates to capture me back, how will I survive?" After leaving home and heading north, all he ever thought of was revenge, he did not know the impossibility of the task, when he saw Xiao Feng, the tragic death of his parents muddled his head, with a burst of effort he thought of using quicklime to blind him, and then he will use the short-knife to stab him to death. But he failed on the first strike and lost his drive,

he immediately thought of escaping but he got captured by Khitan soldiers again.

Originally when he was captured during the initial raid, he was mixed into the crowd, he only got hit once on his back by the back of a blade. But the situation now was vastly different, he staggered and collided with objects as he was dragged along, he was breathless, he fell down every ten steps, every time he falls, the lasso will leave another bloodstained line on the back of his neck. The Khitans did not stop for even a moment, they did not care about his safety and dragged him straight back into Nanjing city. When he entered the city, You TanZhi was drenched with blood, he prayed that he could simply die instead of suffering this misery.

The three Khitan soldiers travelled for a few li in the city, they dragged him before a huge house, You TanZhi saw the floor was covered with bluestone tiles, the pillars were thick and doors were high, he don't know where he was. After waiting for less than the time required to brew tea, the soldier holding the rope rode his horse and entered a huge courtyard, suddenly he gave a whistle, the horse galloped off quickly. You TanZhi did not expect this, the soldier went around the courtyard three times, the horse galloped faster and faster, around ten soldiers were cheering and spectating at the sides. You TanZhi thought: "It seems they want to drag me around till I die!" His forehead, limbs and body collided with the bluestone floor, he was aching everywhere.

Among the laughter of the Khitan soldiers, there was a crisp laughter of a female mixed in. You TanZhi was drowsy, he faintly heard the female laugh and said: "Ha ha, I am afraid this human-kite won't fly at all!" You TanZhi pondered: "What human-kite?"

At this moment, the rope tightened around the back of his neck, his body rose up in the air, he finally understood, the soldier was galloping fast with the horse in order to lift



him up in the air, he was treated like a kite to be played around.

His body was high up in the air, the back of his neck had already lost all feelings from the pain. His nose and mouth were buffeted by the wind, he had difficulties breathing, but he heard the woman clapped and laughed: "Very good! Very good! The human-kite really flew!" You TanZhi looked towards the origin of the voice, the woman was wearing purple robe and was a beautiful young lady. Upon seeing her, his chest was excited, he don't know if it was due to happiness or sadness, as he flew around in the air, he was incapable of thinking.

The beautiful young lady was AhZi. When she saw Xiao Feng released You TanZhi, she was unhappy, after riding for a distance, she deliberately lagged behind and instructed her attendant to quietly capture You TanZhi, and they cannot reveal this matter to Xiao Feng. The followers all knew that Lord Xiao was very doting towards her, thus they accepted her orders, they pretended to adjust the belt buckle of the horse's saddle, once Xiao Feng travelled far away, they turned back and pursued You TanZhi. When AhZi returned to Nanjing, she waited at a temple far away from Xiao Feng's residence. When You TanZhi was successfully captured, she consulted the Khitan for any fresh ideas on torturing people. Someone suggested "fly human-kite". This idea appealed to AhZi, she ordered You TanZhi to be flown as kite and it surprisingly worked.

Watching from below, AhZi found it interesting and she kept cheering, she said: "Let me fly it!" She mounted the horse of the soldier and took over the rope, she said: "Dismount!"

The soldier dismounted the horse and allowed AhZi to fly the "human-kite", AhZi pulled the rope and went a few rounds on the horse, she laughed loudly and cheered repeatedly: "Interesting! Interesting!" but she had just recovered from a heavy injury, her hand was devoid of

strength, once her wrist weakened the rope sagged and You TanZhi crashed heavily on the bluestone floor with a “Peng” sound, his forehead collided with a sharp edge of a rock, immediately the wound cave in and blood gushed out. AhZi was extremely disappointed, she fumed: “This stupid kid is so heavy!”

You TanZhi nearly fainted from the pain, as he listened to her complain about his weight, he wanted to explain but the pain was so bad that he can’t say a single word, a Khitan soldier walked over and undid the ropes around his neck, another Khitan soldier tore of his clothes and randomly bandaged his wounds, fresh blood oozed continuously from his wounds, how can it be stopped?

AhZi said: “He’s fine, he’s fine! Let’s keep on playing, send him up again, as high up in the air as possible.” You TanZhi did not understand the Khitan language coming from her, but he saw her making gestures, pointing at his head, he knew it was something bad.

Sure enough, a soldier picked up the rope, he looped the rope around his armpit and then around his body, he didn’t loop around his neck to avoid strangling him, he gave a shout: “Rise!” and sped off on his horse, he dragged You TanZhi on the ground for a few rounds and eventually You TanZhi flew into the air again. The soldier gradually released the rope and You TanZhi flew higher and higher.

The Khitan soldier abruptly loosened his grip, with a whizzing sound You TanZhi flew like an arrow that has been fired off a bow, he flew high up in the air. AhZi and the rest of the soldiers were cheering and applauding. You TanZhi was unwilling but his body only flew higher and higher, he thought in his heart: “I will really die this time!”

The ascending thrust force gradually died off, he plunged straight down back to earth head-first, in a few more moment his head will smash against the bluestone floor, four Khitan soldiers simultaneously sent out their lasso, they wrap it round his waist and pulled in all four direction. You

TanZhi fainted immediately, but the force coming from all four directions suspended him in mid-air, his head was three feet off the ground. This maneuver was dangerous to the extreme, if one of the lassoes was sent out a bit slow, the force will not balance out, and You TanZhi's brain will definitely burst. The Khitan soldiers practiced this trick on the Song people, the captives all became human-kite, eight to nine out of ten will smash head-first on the ground, although the ground on the grass plain was soft, plummeting down from height, even if their heads did not crack open, their necks will also break, and they will die on the spot.

As everyone was celebrating, the four Khitan soldiers released You TanZhi from the ropes. AhZi took out her silvers and rewarded every soldier with five silvers. The soldiers gave their thanks. They asked: "Miss, you want to play something else?"

AhZi saw You TanZhi had already fainted, she don't know if he's dead or alive, she exerted excessive force when flying the "human-kite", and now her chest hurts badly, she did not have any strength to carry on playing, she replied: "Enough fun for today. Bring this kid to see me tomorrow if he survives, I think of something to wear him down. This person wants to plot against Lord Xiao, we can't let him die too easily." The soldiers agreed in unison, they carried off the blood-soaked You TanZhi.

When You TanZhi woke up, he smelled a moldy odor, he opened his eyes but all he could see was darkness, he first thought was: "Am I dead?" Immediately he felt pain all over his body, he was extremely thirsty. His voice was hoarse and he said: "Water! Water!" but who will even care about him?

After calling out a few times, he felt drowsy and he fell asleep, suddenly he saw his uncle and father fighting with Qiao Feng, blood was flowing everywhere, he saw his mother cradling him in her arms, comforting him gently, asking him to be not afraid. He saw AhZi, her beautiful face, her bright

eyes emitting a strange light. Her face suddenly narrowed into a triangle and became the head of a snake, sticking out its blood-red long-tongue, exposing its fangs as it bit him. You TanZhi struggled, but he can't move, the snake bit him on his hands, legs, neck, everywhere, the bite on his forehead was especially painful. He saw his flesh being bitten off, he wanted to scream but he couldn't.....

He tossed and turned around the whole night, he was tortured when he was awake, and now he felt pain and suffering in his dreams.

The next day, two Khitan soldiers hauled him off to see AhZi, he had high fever and it did not subside, he took a step and immediately collapsed. The two Khitan soldiers supported his left and right shoulder, they reproached him loudly and dragged him into a large house. You TanZhi pondered: "Where are they dragging me? Am I going to be beheaded?" He was drowsy, he found it difficult to think properly, he passed by two sets of door and he stopped outside a hall. The two soldiers reported their arrival outside the hall, a female voice acknowledged from inside, they opened the door to the hall and supported him in.

You TanZhi raised his head, there was a huge decorative carpet in the hall, sitting on a cushion at the end was a beautiful young girl, it was AhZi. Both her feet were resting on the carpet. When You TanZhi saw her snow white crystal-like feet, it was really like smooth jade, it was as soft as satin, his heart was thumping fiercely, his eye fixed firmly on her feet, the flesh on the back of her feet was transparent, several veins were faintly reflected, he really wanted to stretch out his hand to touch it. The two Khitan soldiers released him. You TanZhi swayed left and right, and finally maintained his footing. His gaze did not leave AhZi's feet, he saw her ten toes nails are pale red, it was like ten flower petals.

AhZi looked at him, all she saw was an ugly dirty youth, his face was twisted, jaws protruding, but his eyes glowed

with greedy flames. She immediately thought of an injured and hungry wolf, when she was at XingXiu Sea, she and her two martial-brothers would go hunting, she shot a hungry wolf, but she failed to kill it. That wolf suffered serious injuries and stared at her venomously, the expression was exactly the same as You TanZhi's gaze, the wolf wanted to pounce on her and bite her to death, although it can't jump it still bared a dense row of fangs, howling with anger, but You TanZhi was simply too weak, he doesn't resist at all, it's really not interesting. Yesterday, he threw quicklime at Xiao Feng, and he refused to kneel, his manner and speech was stubborn, he refused money from Xiao Feng, AhZi liked it very much, she thought he must be a ferocious and powerful wild beast. She wanted to torture him, she wanted to cover him with injuries, and when he's injured she wanted him to ferociously fight back and bite her, of course he cannot be allowed to succeed with his bite. But when she captured him and flew him as a "human-kite", this wild beast did not fight back, he gave a dead look, that was not fun at all. She frowned and pondered: "How should I torment him so that it will be fun?"

Suddenly, You TanZhi made two "He He" sound, a burst of strength came out of nowhere, like a leopard he pounced towards AhZi, grabbing her calf, he lowered his head and kiss the back of her feet. AhZi had a huge shock, she screamed. Two Khitan soldiers and four slave girls serving AhZi shouted in unison and they rushed forward to pull him away.

But You TanZhi firmly held onto her calf and refused to let go. The Khitan soldier gave a tug and AhZi was pulled off the cushion seat and she fell onto the carpet mat. The two soldiers were shocked and angry, they dared not pull again, one soldier hit his back, the other soldier hit his face. The injuries on You TanZhi swelled, his fever had not yet subsided, he was in a confused state, it was as if he's crazy,

he did not notice anything in front of him. He firmly held onto AhZi's feet.

AhZi felt his hot dry lips on her feet, she was frightened, but she also felt a strange itching sensation, she screamed: "Ah Yo! He's biting my toes." She hurriedly said to the two soldiers: "Quickly back off, this man is crazy, Ah Yo, do not let him bite my toes." You TanZhi was biting her toes gently, although AhZi felt pain, she was more afraid that he might forcefully bite down, in her flurried state, she knew he cannot be stopped with brute force, she feared that if the soldiers carry on their beatings he will really bite down randomly.

The two soldiers did not have any ideas to handle him and they could only release him. AhZi cried: "Stop biting, I'll spare your life, Ai Yo, I will release you." Currently, You TanZhi was in a deranged state, how would he register what she said? A Khitan soldier grabbed his sabre and withdrew it from the scabbard, he did not want to hesitate anymore and was going to chop it at You TanZhi's neck to cut off his head.

AhZi said: "Hey! You are not a wild beast, why are you biting people? Quickly release your mouth, I will ask someone to tend to your wounds and release you back to Central Plains." You TanZhi still ignored her, he did not exert strength in his bite and didn't injure her, his hands was gently fondling her feet, he was in a dream-like state, he became a human-kite again, flying high up into the clouds.

A Khitan soldier suddenly had a brainwave, he clutched You TanZhi's throat. When You TanZhi's throat was caught, his mouth open involuntary. AhZi quickly withdrew her leg and took out her toes from his mouth, she stood up, fearing that he might go crazy and start biting again, she hid her feet behind the cushions. Two Khitan soldiers caught hold of You TanZhi, they raised their fist and struck his chest repeatedly. After ten fists, he gave two "Wa Wa" sounds and spurt a few mouthful of fresh blood, the blood stained the brightly-colored carpet.

AhZi said: "Stop, stop hitting!" After this thrilling experience, she felt this kid was pretty weird and interesting, she didn't want to kill him immediately. The Khitan soldiers stayed their hands and stopped hitting. AhZi sat cross-legged on the cushion, her pair of feet under her buttocks, she pondered: "How should I torture him?"

AhZi looked up and saw You TanZhi staring at her, she ask: "Why are you staring at me?" You TanZhi had already disregarded his life, he replied: "You are pretty, I like to look at you!" AhZi blushed and thought: "This kid is really bold, he dare to say such frivolous stuff."

But in her entire life, no one has complimented her beauty. When she learnt her skills at XingXiu Sect, her martial-brothers all treated her as a mischievous little girl; when she followed Xiao Feng, he was worried about whether she might cause trouble or if she will die from injury, he didn't care if she was ugly or pretty. You TanZhi spoke bluntly, it was obvious that his praise was honest and sincere, she was secretly overjoyed and pondered: "I will keep him by my side and use him to pass time, that will be pretty good. But brother-in-law said to release him, if he knows I captured him again he will definitely be angry. I can hide the truth today but I can't hide it from him forever. What should I do so that brother-in-law will never know of this matter? I can stop other people from communicating with him but if brother-in-law suddenly comes over to visit me and sees him, what should I do?"

She thought for a moment, suddenly she had an idea: "AhZhu is good at disguise, when she's disguised as father, brother-in-law did not even recognize her. I will give this boy a new appearance, than brother-in-law will surely not recognize him. But if he's not willing, after I apply the make-up, he will simply wash it away and return back to his original appearance, won't it be useless?"

She wrinkled her brows, at once she had another idea, she clapped her hand and smiled: "Great idea! Great idea! I

will do it!" She spoke to the two Khitan soldiers. The soldiers had some queries and they consulted her again. AhZi gave more details in her explanation, she ordered a maid to retrieve ten silvers and gave it to the soldiers. The soldiers accepted the silvers, gave a bow and hauled You TanZhi out of the hall.

You TanZhi shouted: "I want to look at her, I want to look at this heartless pretty girl." The Khitan soldiers and the maids did not understand Han language, they don't understand what he was shouting about.

AhZi smiled and looked at his figure, she thought her idea was very clever and she was very proud of herself.

You TanZhi was thrown back into the dungeon. At dusk, someone brought a bowl of mutton and a few piece of rice-cake. You TanZhi's fever did not subside, he was sputtering nonsense loudly, the person was so scared that he put down the food and left immediately. You TanZhi did not realize he was hungry and thus he never touch the mutton or rice-cakes.

During the night, three Khitans suddenly came into his dungeon. You TanZhi was drowsy and mentally confused, but he saw the expressions of these men were peculiar, it's obvious they harbored bad intentions. He vaguely knew something bad was about to happen, he struggled to stand up, wanting to escape. Two Khitans came forward and held him down, they flipped his body so that his face was facing the sky. You TanZhi swore at them: "Khitan dogs, go and die, I will cut you into a thousand pieces." Suddenly, the third Khitan was holding onto a white object, it's like cotton, also like snow, he forcefully pressed it against his face. The sensation was wet and cold, his brain cleared, but he was suffocating, he thought: "So you want to seal my seven orifice, you want to suffocate me to death!"

But as he thought of this immediately he knew he guessed wrongly, someone gave a few poke to his mouth and nose, he could still breathe, but he could not open his



eyes, his face felt wet and greasy, someone was pinching his face, some wet stuff was applied on his face, it could also be mud paste. You TanZhi was in a daze and he thought: "I wonder what kind of bizarre method these villains will employ to kill me?"

After a while, the mud layer on his face was gently peeled off by someone, You TanZhi opened his eyes, he saw a face mold made out of wet flour, it was his face. The Khitan handled the mold carefully with both hands, he was afraid of damaging it. You TanZhi cursed again: "Stinking Liao dog, you will die without a resting place." The three Khitans ignored him, they took the face mold and left.

You TanZhi suddenly remembered: "Yes, they applied poison on my face, pretty soon, my face will rot, my skin and flesh will drop off, I will become a freak ..." He became more afraid the more he thought about it, he pondered: "Rather than being tortured to death, I should kill myself!" Immediately he banged his head against the wall, "Peng Peng" he banged three times. The prison guard heard the sound and rushed in, he tied up his hands and feet, You TanZhi was half-dead and could only allow himself to be restrained.

After several days, he did not feel any pain on his face, it didn't rot, but he was still determined to die, although he's hungry, he did not eat any of the food delivered.

In the morning of the fourth day, the three Khitan men returned to his dungeon, they hauled him out. You TanZhi's lonely and painful thoughts suddenly made way for sweet thoughts, he thought AhZi was summoning him for more torturing, although his body will suffer, but he could see her beautiful face, he cannot help but reveal a bitter smile.

The three Khitans took him across several alleys, they entered a dim stone house. He saw blazing charcoals at the side of the stone house, a muscular blacksmith was naked above the waist, he was standing next to a large anvil, holding onto a shiny black object, he was examining the

object carefully. The three Khitan men hauled You TanZhi to the front of the blacksmith, two men held his hands, the other held his back. The blacksmith turned around, he studied his face and then looked at the black object in his hands, he seemed to be making some kind of comparison.

You TanZhi looked at the object in the blacksmith's hand, it was a mask made out of wrought iron, there were four holes for the mouth, nose and eyes. He thought to himself: "Make this thing for what?" The blacksmith picked up the mask and covered You TanZhi's face. Naturally You TanZhi avoided it by turning his head away, but someone was pressing his head, he could not avoid, the mask covered his face. He felt a freezing sensation on his face, his skin was stuck onto the metal surface, but he found it odd, the mask fitted him perfectly, it seemed to be custom-made.

You TanZhi felt odd for only an instant, immediately he understood, he felt a chill down his spine: "AiYa, this mask is indeed custom-made. That day they applied wet-flour on my face, it's the mold for this face mask. They go through so much trouble to create this iron mask, what is their intention? Could it be ..... could it be ....." In his heart he knew the vicious intention of these Khitans, but he did not know the purpose, he dared not think anymore, he struggled to run away.

The blacksmith removed the mask from his face, he nodded his head, his expression satisfied. He took a large iron plier and gripped the mask with it, he placed the mask in the furnace and heated it until it turns red, his right hand picked up a metal hammer, "Zheng Zheng Zheng" He started striking, after striking the mask for a while, he stretched his hands and touched You TanZhi's cheekbone and forehead, he's correcting the mask to fix the non-identical portions.

You TanZhi shouted: "Damnable Liao dog, you commit evils that go against nature, you are so savage and wicked,

God will bring calamity upon you, you will all die! Your oxen and horses will drop dead, your babies will die premature!" He cursed and swore, but the Khitan didn't understand a single word. Suddenly the blacksmith turned around. He glared at You TanZhi with a venomous look, he raised the bright red metal plier and poke it towards his eyes. You TanZhi was so scared that he gave a loud shrill.

The blacksmith was just scaring him for fun, he laughed and retracted the plier, he took out a metal curve piece and tested it on the back of You TanZhi's head. Once adjustment was complete, the blacksmith baked the semi-circular iron cover and the mask in the furnace until it turned completely red, he spoke a few words loudly. The three Khitan lifted You TanZhi up, they placed him horizontally on a table, his head facing upward. Two extra Khitan came forward to assist, they forcefully pulled his hair, his head can't move at all, these five men pressed down on his limbs, how can You TanZhi even move an inch?

The blacksmith used the plier to grip the red-hot mask, he stopped for a while, waiting for the temperature to cool, he gave a shout and covered it on You TanZhi's face, white smoke rises, odor of burnt flesh dispersed in all directions, You TanZhi screamed and fainted. The five Khitan men flipped his body over, the blacksmith used the plier to grip the iron cover, he pressed it on the back of his head, the two semi-circular iron cover became an iron sphere, it covered his head. The iron cover was hot to the extreme, once it touches the skin, it will be burnt and be badly mutilated. The blacksmith was the finest ironworker in Yanjing, the two hemisphere combined together flawlessly.

It was as if he went through hell, he experienced being burnt and roasted by raging flames, You TanZhi did not recall the time, and he slowly regained consciousness, but he felt severe pain on his face and the back of his head, it was really hard to endure, and he fainted again. This went on and he fainted three times, and awoke three times, he

shouted loudly but his voice was hoarse to the extreme, it didn't sound like human voice anymore.

He laid down and did not move at all, he clenched his teeth and forcefully endured the pain and suffering on his face and head. This went on for two hours, he finally lifted his hands and touch his face, he felt something hard and cold, he correctly guessed it, the iron mask had already covered his head, he was enraged, he pulled and jerked the mask, but it was welded firmly at the edges, how can he even remove it? In his desperation and hopelessness, he cried out loudly.

He was still young, although he experienced such sufferings, but he managed to endure it and thus it does not seemed right to just seek death, after a few days, his wounds healed and his pain diminished, he knows he was starving. He smelled the fragrant aroma of mutton and rice-cakes, he couldn't resist it and ate it. At this moment he had a clear understanding of the iron mask on his head, he knew the wrought iron mask had sealed his head perfectly, there's no way he can release it, initially he was angry and acted violently but he finally calmed down, he pondered: "This dog traitor Qiao Feng, he covered my face with this iron mask, what is he intentions?"

He thought everything came from Xiao Feng's command, thus he did not suspect that it was AhZi's doing and the purpose of this mask was to hide his identity from Xiao Feng.

All these stuff were done by the captain of the room attendants, under AhZi's suggestion.

AhZi questioned the captain daily on the condition of You TanZhi after he was fitted with the iron mask, initially she was worried that he might die, and all the effort would be wasted, when she heard that he will survive, she was extremely happy. On this day she learnt that Xiao Feng was going to the southern outskirts to inspect the troops, immediately she ordered the attendant to summon You TanZhi to the Beginning Fortune Palace. To make Xiao Feng

happy, YeLu Hongji conferred AhZi as Beginning Fortune Princess, and this Beginning Fortune Palace was bestowed as her residence.

When AhZi saw You TanZhi's appearance, she cannot help but be overjoyed and it flared from the bottom of her heart, she thought: "My method is effective. With this mask on, even if brother-in-law is standing right next to him, he will definitely not recognize him." You TanZhi walk forward a few steps, AhZi applauded and said: "Attendant, this mask is well done, take another fifty silvers and reward the blacksmith!" The attendant replied: "Yes! Thank you princess!"

You TanZhi peered out from the two eye-holes in the mask, he saw AhZi facial expression, there was boundless love and innocence, he listened to her sweet and melodious voice, he cannot help but stare at her blankly.

After wearing the mask, AhZi saw his appearance was strange, but she could still tell that he was staring fixedly at her, she asked: "Silly boy, why are you staring at me?" You TanZhi said: "I...I...I don't know. You...you look pretty." AhZi smiled: "After wearing this mask, does it feel comfortable?" You TanZhi replied bitterly: "Do you think it's comfortable?" AhZi giggled and said: "I really don't know." She saw that the mouth-hole for the mask is a narrow seam, it's just enough for him to drink and eat, if he wanted to eat meat, he have shred it to pieces before he can push it through the seam, but it's impossible for him to bite her legs again, she laughed: "I put this mask on you so that you will never be able to bite me again."

You TanZhi was overjoyed, he said: "Does Miss want me ... want me ... to frequently stay by your side and serve you?" AhZhi said: "Pei! You are a big bastard. If I keep you by my side, you will constantly think of stuff to harm me, how can I tolerate it?" You TanZhi replied: "I ..... I ..... I will never harm you. My enemy is Qiao Feng." AhZi said: "You want to harm my brother-in-law? Isn't it equivalent to harming me? What

is the difference?" As You TanZhi listened to her words, his heart soured, he was speechless.

AhZi smiled: "You want to harm my brother-in-law, it's the same as climbing to heaven, impossible. Silly boy, do you want to die?" You TanZhi said: "Naturally I don't want to die, but with this weird thing on my head, I don't resemble a human or ghost, there is no difference from dying." AhZhi said: "If you would rather die, good, I will fulfill your wish, but I will not let you die immediately. I'll first chop off your left hand." She turned and said to the attendant beside her: "Attendant, haul him out and chop off his left hand!" The attendant replied: "Affirmative!" and he stretched out his hands to grab You TanZhi's arm.

You TanZhi was shocked and cried: "No, no! Miss, I don't want to die, please...please...please don't chop my hands." AhZi gave a faint smile: "Once I say something, it's difficult to retract it, unless ... unless ... you kneel down and kowtow."

You TanZhi had a slight hesitation and the attendant already dragged him two steps back. You TanZhi did not dare to delay any longer, he softened his knees, knelt down and kowtowed, the iron mask knocked against the grey bricks and produced a "Dang" sound. AhZi smiled tenderly and said: "Your kowtow sounds so nice, I have never heard it before, you kowtow a few more times for me to hear."

You TanZhi was afterall a young master of a manor, although he's poor in literature and martial arts, and the people at the manor all knew he was good for nothing, but You Ji died early and he only have one precious son, the young master have hundreds at his beck and call, he grew up being pampered, how can he endure this kind of humiliation? When he met Xiao Feng again for the first time, he was arrogant and rather die than surrender, but after receiving extreme bodily torture and mental trauma, his youthful heroic spirit had dissipated and vanished without a trace, as he listened to AhZi he immediately kowtowed repeatedly, "Dang Dang" sound rang out, this goddess-like

lady praised that his kowtow sounds nice, he felt a faint sense of fondness in his heart.

AhZi gave a charming smile: "Very good, from now on you will listen to me, if you have the slightest bit of defying my orders I will immediately chop off your arm, do you understand?" You TanZhi said: "Yes, yes!" AhZi said: "I made you wear this iron mask, do you know the reason?" You TanZhi said: "I don't know." AhZi said: "You are so stupid, I saved your life and you still didn't express your gratitude. Lord Xiao Feng wants to chop you into minced meat, you still don't know?" You TanZhi replied: "He killed my father, naturally he cannot allow me to live." AhZi said: "He pretended to release you and then ordered someone to capture you back to turn you into minced meat. I saw you are not too bad, it's a pity to kill you and so I hid the truth from him and concealed you. But if Lord Xiao runs into you again, how will you survive? You will even drag me into this mess and implicate me."

You TanZhi suddenly saw the light to the matter, he said: "Ah, Miss you casted this mask and made me wear it, it's for my own good, you saved my life. I ... I am exceedingly grateful, really ... I am really grateful."

AhZi was fooling him, she managed to deceive him and gained his heartfelt appreciation, she was extremely proud and said: "Now you know the reason, next time when you see Lord Xiao, you must not make any sound or else he will recognize your voice. If he recognize your voice, heng, heng! He will give a pull and tear your left arm off, he will give another jerk and tear your right arm off. Attendant, go fetch some Khitan attire and wash his body, his entire body reeks of blood, it smells so bad." The attendant obeyed and led You TanZhi out.

After a while, the attendant returned with You TanZhi and had dressed him in Khitan attire. To make AhZi happy, the attendant deliberately dressed him in multicolored clothes, he looked neither male nor female, like a clown.

AhZi chuckled: "I'll give you a name, called ..... called Iron Clown, you cannot refuse. Iron Clown!" You TanZhi quickly replied: "Yes!"

AhZi was very happy, suddenly she remembered an issue and said: "Attendant! DaShi country gifted a lion to us, correct? Ask the tamer to bring the lion over and summon ten guards here." The attendant obeyed and went out to relay the orders.

Ten spear-wielding guards entered the Palace, they bowed and paid their respects to AhZhi, they turned around, sixteen spear-head faced outward, protecting AhZi. Not long after they heard a lion roar, eight strong-men carried a large metal cage and entered. A male lion was pacing around in the cage, yellow fur and long mane, shape claws and fangs, its expression powerful. The lion's tamer held a leather whip and led the men.

AhZi saw this lion was ferocious and terrifying, she was extremely happy and said: "Iron Clown, you said you will obey anything I say, but I don't know if it's true or false. I want to test you and see if you really obey anything I say." You TanZhi replied: "Yes!" He saw this lion and secretly had some misgivings, he did not understand the purpose, but listening to AhZi's words, his heart start beating rapidly. AhZi said: "I don't know if the iron mask on your head is hard and sturdy enough, you go stick your head in the cage, let the lion give it a few bite and check if it can break the iron mask."

You TanZhi had a huge shock, he said: "This...this can't be tested. If the mask really breaks, then my head ..." AhZi said: "What use are you? You are afraid of such small matters, a real man should not be afraid of dying. Furthermore, I think the mask will probably not break." You TanZhi replied: "Miss, you can't play around with such matters, even if the mask doesn't break, this beast will flatten the mask and my head ..." AhZi chuckled: "At most your head gets flatten. You are such a troublesome kid, your



original appearance isn't good, if your head gets flattened it will be inside the mask, the rest of us can't see it at all, who cares whether you're good looking or not." You TanZhi quickly replied: "I am not talking about whether I am good looking but ....." AhZi's expression became grave and said: "You don't obey my words, fine, I am done with my assessment of you, you deliberately lie to me, I'll throw you into the cage and feed the lion!" She instructed the attendant using Khitan's language. The attendant replied: "Affirmative!" and started dragging You TanZhi's arm.

You TanZhi pondered: "If I get thrown into the cage, how can I even survive, it's better to just obey her words, stick my head into the cage and try my luck!" He shouted: "Don't drag me in, don't drag me in! Miss, I will obey you!"

AhZi smiled and said: "That's a good boy! Let me tell you, whatever I tell you next time, just do it immediately, stop giving excuses and make me angry. Attendant, give him thirty lashes." The attendant replied: "Affirmative!" and took the leather whip from the lion-tamer, with a "Shua" sound, he lashed it on You TanZhi's back. You TanZhi cried out in pain.

AhZi said: "Iron Clown let me tell you, when I ask someone to hit you, I actually think highly of you. Your making so much noise, you dislike me hitting you is that it?" You TanZhi replied: "I like it very much, I thank Miss for bestowing kindness on me!" AhZhi said: "Good, carry on hitting!" The attendant consecutively lash out ten times, You TanZhi gritted his teeth and endured, he didn't make a single sound, luckily he was wearing an iron mask and the whip avoided his head, he can endure lashings on his chest and back.

AhZi saw him endure silently, she felt it was boring and said: "Iron Clown, you say you like me to call someone to beat you, correct?" You TanZhi replied: "Yes!" AhZi said: "Is your word true or false? Are you fabricating lies to deceive me? " You TanZhi said: "It's true, I don't dare to lie to Miss."

AhZi said: "Since you like it so much, why don't you laugh? Why don't you shout out and say that it feels good?" You TanZhi was scared out of his wits under her torture, he even forgot to be angry, and replied: "Miss treats me very well, you ask someone to hit me, it feels good." AhZi said: "Excellent, let's try it again!"

With a "Pai" sound, the whip lashed out again, You TanZhi quickly said: "Miss, thank you for saving my life, this whip feels good!" He was lashed for over twenty times in an instant, combined with the previous whipping, it's already more than thirty lashes. AhZi waved her hand and said: "Forget it, it's enough for today. Stick your head in the cage."

You TanZhi bones ached, he felt as if he was about to split apart, he limped beside the cage, gritted his teeth and stuck his head between the iron bars. The lion saw him suddenly stick his head to provoke, it was startled and retreated two steps, it growled to show its authority.

AhZi cried out: "Call the lion to bite, why is it not biting?" The lion tamer rebuked the beast a few times, the lion heard the orders, it pounced forward, opened its mouth and bit You TanZhi's head. There was a "Zi Zi" sound, the lion's fang was grinding the iron mask. You TanZhi closed his eyes, he felt hot air entering the holes in the mask, he knew his head was in the lion's mouth, he felt severe pain from his forehead and back of his head. When the iron mask was first put on him, the red-hot metal burnt and roasted his head and face, after a few days, scars began to form and his wounds healed, but with this bite, all his injuries ruptured and the wounds opened up again.

The lion exerted its strength and bit a few times, but it can't bite down, its fangs ached, it extended its right paw and clawed You TanZhi's shoulder. You TanZhi felt severe pain from his shoulder and cried out with an "Ah" sound. The lion detected a loud noise within its mouth, it was shocked,

it opened its mouth to release the head and retreated to a corner in the cage.

The lion tamer rebuked loudly, he urged the lion to bite You TanZhi again. You TanZhi was furious he stretched out his hand to grab the back of the tamer's neck, he pushed and inserted the tamer's head into the cage. The lion tamer cried out loudly.

AhZi applauded and laughed: "Very good, very good! No one is to interfere, let both of them fight it out among themselves." The Khitan soldiers originally wanted to move You TanZhi's hand away, but after hearing AhZi's order, they stopped and did not move.

The lion tamer struggled with all his might. You TanZhi unruliness flared up, he simply refused to let go. The tamer can only seek help from the lion, he shouted: "Bite, forcefully bite him!" The lion heard his urging, it roared and rushed forward, the beast knew it's supposed to bite forcefully, but it don't know what to bite, two dense row of fangs clamped down, with a "Kela" sound, the lion bit off half of the tamer's head, splattering brain pulp and fresh blood on the floor.

AhZi smiled and said: "Iron Clown wins!" She ordered the soldiers to carry out the corpse and cage, she said to You TanZhi: "That's the way, you made me happy, how should I reward you?" She placed her finger at her cheek and pondered. You TanZhi replied: "Miss, I do not want your reward, I just want you to promise me something." AhZi said: "What thing?" You TanZhi said: "I beg you to allow me to stay by your side and be your servant." AhZi said: "Be my servant? Why? En, I know it, you are waiting for opportunity, when Lord Xiao sees me, you will strike and harm him to avenge your parents." You TanZhi said: "No! No! It's definitely not like that." AhZi said: "You don't want your revenge?" You TanZhi said: "I want to. But firstly, I can't beat him. Secondly, I don't want to implicate you."

AhZi said: "Then why do you want to be my servant?" You TanZhi said: "Miss is a goddess that descended from heaven, the number one beauty in the entire world, I ..... I wish to see you ever day."

His words were really frivolous, based on his current situation, he was way too bold. But when AhZi listened to it, she felt good. She was still a child although her appearance was elegant, her body features has not yet fully develop, after long period of injuries, she became thin and haggard, as for "Number one beauty in the entire world", it's far from the actual truth, when she heard someone complimented her appearance, she cannot help but feel happy.

As she was about to approve You TanZhi's request, the palace guard suddenly reported: "Lord Xiao arrives!" AhZi gave a glance at You TanZhi and said softly: "Lord Xiao is coming, are you afraid?" You TanZhi was extremely frightened, but he wanted to pretend and said: "Not afraid!"

The Palace's door was wide open, Xiao Feng entered, dressed in fur coat. As he stepped through the door, he saw a pool of blood on the floor, he also saw You TanZhi wearing an iron mask looking very peculiar, he laughed and said to AhZi: "You look very healthy today, what new tricks are you playing? Why is this guy wearing that bizarre thing on his head?" AhZi smiled and said: "This iron-head guy is a tribute from GaoChang country to the west, his name is Iron Clown, even a lion can't break his iron head, you can see the imprints of the fang." Xiao Feng inspected the iron mask, there was indeed fang markings. AhZi continued: "Brother-in-law, can you remove his iron mask?"

You TanZhi was scared out of his wits. He personally witnessed Xiao Feng extraordinary bravery when combating the heroes of Central Plains, with both his fists, he shocked the steel shields off the hands of his father and uncle, if he really wants to remove the iron mask, it can be done without effort. When the iron mask was put on his head, he felt despondent and lost all his desires, but at this moment, he

prayed that the iron mask will remain forever on his head so that Xiao Feng cannot see his real appearance.

Xiao Feng stretched out his finger and gently tapped the iron mask a few times, it issued a clanking sound, he smiled and said: "This iron mask is extremely solid, it's crafted meticulously, it will be a shame to ruin it!"

AhZi said: "The envoy from GaoChang said this iron-head man was born green-faced and long toothed, he look thirty percent like human, seventy percent like ghost, those who sees him will run away in fear, thus his parents constructed an iron mask for him to wear to avoid scaring others. Brother-in-law, I want to see his real appearance, see how scary he really is."

You TanZhi was so scared that his body trembled, his teeth chattered with a "GeGe" sound.

Xiao Feng saw his abnormal fear and said: "This man is terribly scared, why remove his iron mask? This man is accustomed to wearing the iron mask since childhood, if you forcibly remove his mask he will have difficulty living in the future."

AhZi clapped her hands and said: "Now that is fun. In the past, when I see a turtle, I will catch it and remove its shell, I will then observe if it can live without its shell."

Xiao Feng cannot help but frown, he felt that it was cruel to remove the turtle shell, he said: "AhZi, why do you always do this kind of evil stuff that leaves people half-dead and half-alive?"

AhZi groaned and said: "Of course you don't like it! I am not as good as AhZhu, if I am like AhZhu, you won't ignore me for so many days." Xiao Feng said: "Ever since I became the Lord of Southern Chancellery, I am so busy that I can't even take a breather. But aren't I here every day to accompany you for a while?" AhZi said: "Accompany me for a while, heng, accompany me for a while! I just don't like you to use 'accompany me for a while' to excuse yourself. If I

am AhZhu, you will surely accompany me every day, you will never leave me, it won't be 'a while' or 'half a while'!"

Xiao Feng knew she spoke the truth, he had no reply, he only laughed and said: "Brother-in-law is an adult, I am not interested in playing with a child, you should go find some young female companion to chat with you and relieve your boredom." AhZi fumed: "Child, child ..... I am not a child! If you are not interested in playing, then why do you come here?" Xiao Feng said: "I came to check if you're feeling better? Have you eaten the bear's gall today?"

AhZi took a cushion off a seat and slam it on the floor, she kicked it away and said: "If I am not happy, even if I eat one hundred bear's gall, I still won't recover."

Xiao Feng saw her childlike tantrums, if she was AhZhu, he will try to coax her and make her happy, but towards this unruly vicious girl he cannot help but loathe her, he said: "You go rest for a while." He stood up and walked away.

AhZi stared at his back, as she was about to cry she saw You TanZhi, she vented her anger on him and shouted: "Attendant, give him another thirty lashes!" the attendant replied: "Affirmative!" and picked up the whip.

You TanZhi said loudly: "Miss, what mistake did I make?" AhZi did not reply him, she waved her hand and said: "Lash him!" With a "Shua" sound the attendant lashed down with his whip. You TanZhi said: "Miss, what mistake did I make, you have to tell me lest I commit it again." The attendant lashed him again and again.

AhZi said: "Since I want to beat you, you should not ask what mistake you make, did I mistakenly beat you? You ask what mistake you make, I am beating you precisely because you ask this question."

You TanZhi said: "You beat me first, then I ask you the question. I did not ask you the question when you sent someone to beat me." "Shua" he was lashed again, "Shua Shua Shua" he received another three lashes.

AhZhi smiled and said: "I predicted that you will ask the question, so I ask someone to hit you in advance. And you really did ask the question, so isn't my prediction correct? This proves that you are not loyal enough. I want to ask someone to beat you, if you are loyal, you will automatically volunteer to be beaten. But you keep giving excuses and questioned me, ok, since you don't like to be beaten, I will stop beating you."

When You TanZhi heard the word "I will stop beating you" his heart grew cold, the hairs on his body all stood up, he knew that if AhZhi stop beating him, she will definitely come up with a punishment that is ten times more atrocious than whipping, it's better to just endure the thirty lashes, he quickly said: "Yes, it's subordinate's fault! Miss is showing great kindness by beating me, it's beneficial to subordinate's body, I beseech Miss to whip me more, the more the better."

AhZi gave a charming smile and said: "Finally, you are getting smarter. I don't show special favors, you said to whip you, the more the better, you think I will spare you once I am happy?" You TanZhi said: "No, subordinate is not asking Miss for favors." AhZi said: "You said the more the better, it is really your heartfelt desire?" You TanZhi said: "Yes, it's subordinate's heartfelt desire." AhZi said: "That being the case, I'll grant you your wish. Attendant, give him one hundred lashes, he likes being whipped."

You TanZhi was shocked, he thought: "Getting whipped one hundred times, can I still survive?" but things had already reached this stage, even if he was not willing, they would still whip him, it's pointless to debate further, he remained silent.

AhZi said: "Why aren't you speaking? You are not willing? I ask someone to beat you, you think it's unfair?" You TanZhi said: "Subordinate is completely convinced, I know that Miss granted my request solely out of good intentions." AhZi said: "Then why aren't you speaking just now?" You TanZhi

did not know how to reply, he was in a daze for a while before saying: "This...this...subordinate thinks that Miss has shown great kindness on me, subordinate is very appreciative, I don't know what to say, I don't know how to repay Miss in the future."

AhZi said: "Ah ha! You say you want to repay me. I whip you now, you will remember every single whip and remember the hate." You TanZhi repeatedly shook his head and said: "No, no! It's not true. I said to repay Miss, is really repay. Subordinate is willing to risk my own life and sacrifice myself for you."

AhZi said: "Good, carry on whipping!" The attendant said: "Yes!" with a "Pai" sound he lashed down with his whip.

After fifty lashes, You TanZhi was in so much pain that he was mentally numb, his knees softened, and he slowly knelt down. AhZi smiled as she watch, she waited for him to plead mercy. When he starts pleading, she will use it as the excuse to add another fifty lashes. But You TanZhi was in a daze, he's no longer aware of his surroundings, he only moaned softly, he did not beg for mercy. After seventy lashes, he fainted. The attendant did not show the slightest bit of mercy, he kept on lashing and completed the full one hundred lashes, only then did he stop.

AhZi saw You TanZhi was on the verge of death, he had a high chance of dying, she felt disappointed. She thought of Xiao Feng's indifferent attitude towards her, she felt melancholic and troubled, she said: "Carry him off! This person is not fun at all! Attendant, do you have any new fun stuff?"

You TanZhi required one month to fully recover from the lashings. The Khitans saw that AhZi had forgotten about him, she did not summon him for more torture sessions, and thus they put him together with Song captives and made to do all sort of heavy manual labor, carrying excrements, washing sheep's shed, picking cow dung, shearing sheepskin, he did all sorts of manual work.



You TanZhi was wearing an iron mask, everyone made fun of him and insulted him, even his Han compatriots treated him as a freak. You TanZhi resigned himself to adversity, he turned into a mute. When others beat him and cursed him, he never resisted or fought back. When someone rode past with a horse, he will always raise his head and give a glance, his heart kept thinking about one thing: "When will Miss call me back for whipping?" He only hoped to see AhZi again, even if he has to suffer lashings, he will endure it willingly, he never thought of escaping.

Two months passed by, the weather gradually got warmer, You TanZhi was with the captives, carrying soil and bricks to strengthen the southern walls outside Nanjing. Suddenly, he heard the sound of horse's hoof, a few horses came galloping from the south, he heard a melodious voice laughing: "AhYo, this Iron Clown is not dead yet! I thought he's dead already! Iron Clown, come over!" It was AhZi's voice.

You TanZhi prayed day and night, he waited for this exact moment of glory, when he heard AhZi called him, both his legs seemed to be rooted to the ground, he couldn't move an inch, but his heart was thumping madly, his palms sweating.

AhZi called again: "Iron Clown, god dammit! I am asking you to come over, you didn't hear it, ei!" Only now did You TanZhi respond: "Yes, Miss!" He turned and walked towards her horse, he cannot help but raise his head to look at her eyes. After being separated for four months, AhZi's face was rosy, she looked even more beautiful, You TanZhi's heart gave a thump, he stumbled and fell down, the crowd burst out in laughter, he hastily climbed up, not daring to look at her again, he quickly walked towards her.

AhZi was in a good mood, she laughed: "Iron Clown, how come you didn't die?" You TanZhi said: "I said...I said I want to repay Miss's kindness, I haven't repaid it, I can't simply die." AhZi liked it very much, she smiled tenderly and said:

"I am currently looking for a loyal lackey to do something for me, the Khitans are coarse and careless they might mess things up, you didn't die, that's good, follow me!" You TanZhi replied: "Yes!" and followed behind her horse.

AhZi waved her hand and her attendant along with three Khitan guards went back, they did not follow. The attendant knew that regardless of what she says, AhZi cannot be persuaded, but fortunately this iron-head man looks weak and cowardly, there's no harm in letting him follow the Princess, she said: "Miss, please return early!" and the four of them dismounted from their horses and waited by the city gate.

AhZi travelled slowly on her horse, after walking about seven to eight li, the route was getting more and more deserted, they turned into a spooky valley, the ground was covered with rotten grass and leaves. As they travelled a few more li, the mountain road got rugged, AhZi can no longer travel on her horse, she dismounted, she ordered You TanZhi to guide the horse and they kept on walking. The surroundings were gloomy, cold wind blew from the mountain valley down to the narrow road, the wind made their skin sore.

AhZi said: "Ok, it's here!" She ordered You TanZhi to tie the horse to a tree and continued: "The things you see today, you cannot leak out the slightest bit of information to others, you cannot even mention it in front of me, do you understand?"

You TanZhi said: "Yes, yes!" His happiness was raging wildly, AhZi only wanted him as her follower, they even came to this deserted place, even if she whipped him severely, he will gladly endure it.

AhZi stretched her hands into her bosom and retrieved a yellow wooden tripod, she placed it on the floor and said: "Later if some bizarre bugs start appearing, you shouldn't panic, you definitely cannot make any sound." You TanZhi replied: "Yes!"

AhZi again took out a small cloth bag from her bosom, she opened the bag, inside was a few lumps of yellow, black and purple spices. She pinched a little spice from each of the lumps and placed it in the tripod, she lit her flint and made a fire, afterwards she closed the cover of the tripod, she said: "Let's go wait by that tree side."

AhZi sat down under a tree, You TanZhi dared not sit beside her, separated by a few zhang, he sat on top of a rock facing the wind. Cold wind blew, the wind carried the faint scent of her body, You TanZhi cannot refrain from being delirious with passion, he actually get to experience such a moment in life, even though he suffered greatly all this time, it was not in vain. He hoped that AhZi will sit at this tree forever and he will get to accompany her forever.

As he was getting drunk with passion, suddenly he heard a rustling sound in the bushes, a scarlet creature was moving within the grass, it was a large centipede, its body glistening, a tumor protruded on its forehead, it's obviously different from regular centipede.

The centipede detected the fragrance from the wooden tripod, it weaved its way towards the tripod, it entered the tripod from a hole at the bottom, and it did not come out again after that. AhZi took out a thick piece of brocade from her bosom, her foot step lightened and she gingerly approached the wooden tripod, she covered the tripod with the brocade and wrapped it firmly, fearing the centipede might escape, she put the tripod in a leather bag hanging off the horse, she smiled and said: "Let's go!" She mounted the horse and left.

You TanZhi followed behind her, wondering: "That wooden tripod is extremely bizarre, but it's most probably due to the burning of spices that attracted the large centipede. What's so fun about that large centipede that Miss has to travel such a long way to this mountain valley to catch it?"

When AhZi returned to the Beginning Fortune Palace, she instructed the guards to arrange accommodation for You TanZhi at the side of the Palace. You TanZhi was elated, he knew that from now on he would be able to see AhZi frequently.

Sure enough, on the next morning, AhZi summoned You TanZhi, she led him into the main hall of the Palace, she closed the door leaving the two of them alone in the hall. AhZi walked towards a clay urn to the west, she removed the urn cover, laughingly she said: "You see, isn't it magnificent?" You TanZhi peered into the urn, he saw the large centipede which they caught yesterday moving around swiftly.

AhZi took out a big rooster that has been prepared in advance, she took out a short knife, chopped off the rooster's beak and claws, and threw the rooster into the urn. The big centipede climbed onto the rooster's head, and started sucking its blood, after a while the rooster died due to poisoning. The centipede's body gradually swelled, blood started dripping out of its red forehead. AhZi's expression was joyful, she whispered: "It's done, it's done! This set of martial arts can be completed!"

You TanZhi pondered: "So, you catch centipede for the purpose of practicing martial arts. Is it called Centipede Skill?"

She fed the centipede for seven days, every day the centipede will suck the blood of one big rooster, on the eighth day, AhZi again summoned You TanZhi to the main hall, she smiled and said: "Iron Clown, how well did I treat you?" You TanZhi said: "Miss has shown great kindness towards me, it's as weighty as a mountain." AhZi said: "You said you are willing to go through hell and high water for me, risk you own life, it is true or false?" You TanZhi said: "Subordinate dare not lie to Miss. Miss only has to order, subordinate will never defy." AhZi said: "Very good. Let me tell you, I want to practice a set of martial arts, but it

requires assistance from others. Are you willing to assist me in practicing this art? If I succeed, I will definitely reward you heavily." You TanZhi said: "Subordinate will naturally listen to your orders, I don't require any rewards." AhZi said: "Very good, we will begin practicing now."

She sat cross-legged, her hands rubbing each other, she closed her eyes and channeled her energy, after a while she said: "You go stick your hand into the urn, the centipede will definitely bite you, you must not move at all, let it suck your blood, the more blood the better."

These past seven days, You TanZhi saw that the centipede only need to suck a few mouthful of blood from the rooster, the healthy and lively rooster would drop dead immediately, it can be deduced that the centipede's poison was no small matter, when he listened to AhZi, he cannot help but hesitate and did not reply. AhZi's expression became grave, she asked: "Why, you are not willing?" You TanZhi said: "It's not that I am unwilling, but ... but" AhZi said: "But? But this centipede is extremely poisonous, you are afraid of dying is that correct? You are a human or a rooster?" You TanZhi said: "I am not a rooster." AhZi said: "Precisely, the rooster will die when its blood is sucked by the centipede, you are not a rooster, how will you die? You said you are willing to go through hell and high water for me, risk getting your body and bones crushed. This centipede will only suck a little bit of your blood for fun, your body and bones will get crushed?"

You TanZhi was speechless, he raised his head and looked at AhZi, he imagined seeing her red lips open, any scornful thoughts he had of this lady, it immediately vanished and he was mesmerized, it was as if he was spellbound by the devil, he said: "Yes, I will follow your orders." He clenched his teeth, closed his eyes and slowly inserted his right hand into the urn.

As his fingers reached into the urn, he felt pain on the fingertip of his middle finger. He cannot help but withdrew

his fingers a little. AhZi cried: "Don't move, don't move!" You TanZhi forcefully endured it, he opened his eyes, the centipede has bitten his middle finger and was currently sucking his blood. His hairs stood on its ends, he wanted to fling it on the ground and crush it with his feet, although his back was facing AhZi, he could feel her sharp gaze penetrating his back, it's like being pierced by two sharp daggers, he dared not move an inch.

Fortunately, when the centipede was sucking his blood, he did not feel extreme pain, but as he saw the centipede gradually swell up, he also saw a faint purple coating covering his middle finger. The purple became deeper and deeper, slowly it turned jet black, after a while, the blackness spread from his middle finger to his palm, and finally it spread from his palm to his arm. You TanZhi had already disregarded his life, he was calm, the corner of his lips revealed a smile, but this smile was hidden by the mask and AhZi did not see it.

AhZi's gaze was on the centipede, she gave it her undivided attention, not the slightest bit of neglect. The centipede finally released You TanZhi's finger and it fell back into the urn and stopped moving. AhZi cried: "Gently place the centipede into the wooden tripod, be careful, don't injure it."

You TanZhi complied and lifted the centipede, he placed it into the wooden tripod. AhZi closed the tripod cover, after a while, black blood started dripping down from the hole in the tripod.

AhZi's face revealed great happiness, she quickly extended her palm to catch the blood droplets, she sat cross-legged and channeled her energy, the blood droplets diffused into her palm. You TanZhi pondered: "That is my blood, but she absorbed it into her body. It seems she's practicing Poison-Centipede Palm."

After a long period, the black blood stopped dripping, AhZi lifted the tripod cover, the centipede was stiff and had

died.

AhZi rubbed both her palms together, she looked at her palm again, her palm was still white and flawless, without the slightest bit of bloodstains, she knew that the practicing formula she eavesdropped from her master was correct, she lifted the wood tripod and emptied the dead centipede on the ground, she left the Palace hurriedly, she did not even give You TanZhi a glance, it seemed he was the same as the dead centipede, both of them outlived their usefulness.

You TanZhi stared at AhZi's back, until her back vanished from his view and her clothes cannot be seen anymore, but the blackness had spread to his armpit, in addition his arm started to feel numb and itchy, in an instant, it was as if millions of fleas was biting him at the same time.

He burst out screaming, he jumped up and started scratching, once he started scratching, the itch became worse and seemed to go deep into his bone marrow, bugs were crawling around his heart and lungs, wriggling and moving. Pain can be endured but this itch was impossible to resist, he kept jumping up and down and screaming, "Dang Dang" sound rang out as he banged his head on the wall, he prayed that he can faint immediately and lose his consciousness to avoid having to bear this strange itch.

He kept knocking and banging himself, an item fell out of his bosom, the oilcloth wrappings loosened revealing a yellow book, it's the Sanskrit manual picked up by him the last time. Under the severe itch, he did not bother to pick up the book, but he saw the book flipped open. The itch was really hard to bear, You TanZhi rolled on the floor, after a round of random scratching and knocking, he bent over and panted, tears, mucus and saliva all flowed out of the mouth hole of the iron mask, dripping onto the Sanskrit manual. In his drowsy state he did not keep track of the time, but the page of the book was soaked full of tears and saliva, inadvertently, a drawing of a monk appeared among the curvy writings. The monk's posture was very strange, his

head was between two outspread legs, extending out, his hands were clutching his feet.

He was not in the mood to think of the odd posture, he can't even breathe due to the itch, he laid on the ground, randomly tearing his clothes into pieces, he violently rubbed his skin on the ground, in an instant, blood oozes out from his skin. He was rubbing randomly, suddenly, he slipped and his head cross over between his two legs. He was wearing an iron mask, he was stuck and could not withdraw his head, he stretched out his hand to assist, his right hand clutched his right foot. But he was too worned out and dead-tired, he couldn't move, he had to temporarily stay his hand and regain his breath, inadvertently, he saw the book in front of him, the book depicted a skinny monk, the posture was similar to his current posture, he felt amazed and found it funny, but the strangest thing was after maintaining this posture, his bodily itch felt bearable, his breathing also became smoother, thus he did not try to withdraw his head from his legs, he continued lying on the ground, he heartily followed the monk's posture depicted in the drawing, his left hand clutched his left foot, chin touching the ground. This way, his posture was completely identical to the monk and he found it easier to breathe.

As he maintained the posture, his eyes got closer to the book, he look at the monk again, two large yellow words were written beside the monk, it was crooked and strange, there were many small red arrows on the word. As You TanZhi maintained this posture, he was extremely tired and immediately let go of his hands and stood up. Once he stood up, the itch became so bad that he can't breathe, he quickly stuck his head between his legs, hands clutching his feet, chin touching the ground, as he made this odd posture, his breathing immediately became smoother.

He dared not move anymore, after a long time, he became bored, he looked at the drawing of the monk and at the two strange words. He look at the small arrows on the



word, he instinctively pondered about the small arrows, the strange itch on his right arm seemed to turn into a line of warm energy, it circulated a few times around his throat and chest, it slowly dissipated and disappeared from his shoulders and from the top of his head.

He kept looking at the small arrows on the word and pondered about them repeatedly, each time a line of warm energy will pass by his head and the strange itch on his arm will reduce slightly. He was surprised but he did not bother to think about the underlying reason, he just followed the same steps, after completing thirty cycles, he only felt a slight itch on his arm, after another ten cycles, his fingers, palm and arm was completely itch-free.

He withdrew his head from his legs, extended his palm and looked at it, the black cloud on his palm had vanished, he was pleased, suddenly he exclaimed: "AiYo, this is not good! I transferred all the centipede's poison into my brain! The strange itch is already gone, but how come a strange monk appeared in the drawings? I even unintentionally made the same posture as the monk? This monk must be a Buddha, he came to save my life." Immediately he knelt and respectfully kowtowed to the drawing of the strange monk, "Dang Dang" sound rang out as his iron mask knocked on the floor.

He did not realize that the drawing in the book was drawn using special herbal solution from India, it will only reveal itself when wet, it will disappear when it's dry, thus both AhZhu and Xiao Feng never saw the drawing. The figure in the drawing depicted the proper way to channel energy, the Sanskrit writings provided the explanations, eminent monks from Shaolin's previous generation had knowledge on Sanskrit, although they don't know the mystery of the drawing, they could still practice the Tendon-Changing Sutra based on directions given by the writings. When You TanZhi suffered the strange itch, his tears and saliva flowed freely, luckily it landed on the page and revealed the drawing. The

drawing was an ingenious method to neutralize external poison when practicing the skill, it was created by an ancient master from India as part of a set of secret Yoga techniques. When You TanZhi made the posture, it was not completely by chance or coincidence, it was also due to natural human instincts. When he had trouble enduring the strange itch, it's natural human behavior to lower the head to the ground, nothing strange or surprising, but his tears and saliva dripping on the page, it's really pure luck and coincidence. He was dumbstruck for a while, his exhaustion reached its limit, immediately he laid down and slept on the floor. On the morning of the second day, AhZi hurriedly entered the Palace, she saw his naked bizarre appearance and gave an "Ah!" cry, she said: "Why aren't you dead yet?" You TanZhi was shocked and reply: "Subordinate....subordinate is still alive!" He secretly felt depressed: "It seems she thought I had died long ago."

AhZi said: "It's good that you are not dead! Quickly dress yourself properly and follow me to catch poison bugs." You TanZhi said: "Yes!" AhZi followed and he asked for clothes from Khitan soldiers. The head of a group of Khitan soldiers was very welcoming towards him, he gave him a set of clean clothes to change into.

AhZi brought You TanZhi to the deserted mountain valley, she still used the Divine Wooden King Tripod to attract poisonous bugs, used rooster blood to feed the bugs, and then let them suck the blood of You TanZhi, and then used the blood to practice her skill. The second bug was a green spider, the third bug was a large scorpion. You TanZhi followed the drawings on the book to neutralize the poison.

At XingXiu Sea, whenever AhZi saw her master practice this divine skill, she will see a dead corpse every time, the people were all captured from nearby villages under the orders of their master, she expected You TanZhi to die when he got poisoned by the bugs, but amazingly, he didn't die, and she cannot help but feel secretly surprise.

This catching of bugs for practicing of skill went on continuously, after three months, the number of poisonous bugs within ten li of Nanjing city gradually decreased, the bugs attracted by the fragrance were all weak and frail and not to AhZi's liking. Thus, both of them have to move farther out to catch the bugs.

On this day, they arrived at a place thirty li away from the city, spices burnt in the wooden tripod, after waiting for more than two hours, they finally heard something rustled in the bushes, it seemed to be some kind of snake or worm. AhZi said: "Lay low!" Immediately You TanZhi lowered his body, he heard a loud sound, it was not normal.

The sound was mixed with a vomiting stench, You TanZhi held his breath and did not move, he saw the long grass parted, a white body black-striped python slithered out, the python's head was triangular, a tumor protruded from the top of its head. Snakes were rare in Northern area, but such a strange shaped python, nobody has ever seen it before. The python slithered next to the wooden tripod, it circled and revolved around the tripod, the python body was two zhang long, its body was thicker than a human arm, how can it fit into the small tripod? But as it smelled the spices and the fragrance of the wooden tripod, it used its head to ram the tripod.

AhZi didn't expect to attract such giant snake, she was extremely shocked, at the moment she did not have any idea on what to do, she quietly sneaked beside You TanZhi and whispered: "What should we do? If the python breaks the wooded tripod, won't it be ruined?"

You TanZhi noticed her tone was gentle when discussing with him, he felt overwhelmingly flattered, at once his courage received a huge boost, he said: "Don't worry, I will drive away the snake!" He stood up and took big strides towards the snake. The snake heard a sound and immediately coiled its body together, it raised its head and stuck out its blood-red tongue, hissing and waiting to

pounce. After seeing such display of power and influence, You TanZhi dared not approach rashly.

At this moment, he suddenly felt a burst of cold wind on his body, he saw a line of fire burning at the western corner, in no time it burned in front of him. As the line got nearer, he saw that it's actually not a line of fire but something crawling among the vegetation, green grass immediately dried and charred when the thing touch it, at the same time the air became colder and colder. He stepped back a few steps, the yellow line changed its direction and move towards the wooden tripod, the thing was actually a silkworm.

The silkworm was like a pure white jade, with a tinge of green, it's two times larger than a regular silkworm, it's like an earthworm, its body transparent and crystal-like. The python was originally aggressive and overbearing, but now it seems to be extremely fearful, it withdrew its large triangular head and hide within its body. The crystal silkworm was unusually swift and climbed onto the snake's body, as it climbed up, it's like a red-hot charcoal, it scorched a line on the snake, when it reached the top of the snake's head, the python's body cracked and split into two, it moved right next to the snake's venom gland, sucking the venom, after a while its body swell, looking from afar, it looked like a crystal bottle filled with purple liquid.

AhZi was delighted, she whispered: "This silkworm is so powerful, it must the king of all poisonous creatures." But You TanZhi was secretly worried: "If such venomous silkworm suck my blood, I will really die this time!"

The silkworm circled around the wood tripod, it crawled up the tripod, immediately, burnt mark appeared on the tripod. The silkworm seemed to have psychic power, it went one round on top of the tripod, it seemed to know that if it enters the tripod it will be in danger, thus it did not behave like other poisonous creatures, it climbed down from the tripod and went northwest.

AhZi was excited and anxious, she cried: "Quick, chase it!" She covered the tripod with brocade, picked up the wooden tripod and chased after the silkworm. You TanZhi followed behind her, they tracked the silkworm by using the scorch mark it left behind. Although this silkworm was a small bug, it crawled like the wind, in a blink of an eye it travelled several zhang, luckily it leaved scorch marks on places it travelled and they didn't lose track of it.

Both of them chased for over three to four li, suddenly they heard the gushing sound of water, they reached a small stream. The scorch mark reached the edge of the stream and disappeared, on the opposite side of the stream, there was no scorch mark, obviously the silkworm fell into the stream and was washed away. AhZi stomped her feet and complained: "You should have voiced out and tell me to chase faster, where are we supposed to find it now? I don't care, you have to find it for me!" You TanZhi was very apprehensive, searching around randomly, how can he even find it?

Both of them searched for more than two hours, it was getting dark, AhZi was feeling tired and lost patience, she said angrily: "I don't care, you have to catch it back, otherwise you don't need to see me again." She turned around and went back to the city alone.

You TanZhi was extremely worried, he followed the stream and searched downstream, he searched for over seven to eight li, as dusk fell, he suddenly spotted scorch mark among the opposite vegetation. You TanZhi was overjoyed, he rushed out and shouted: "Miss, miss, I found it!" but AhZi had gone back long ago.

You TanZhi waded across the stream and followed the scorch mark. He saw scorch mark heading towards the mountain. He gathered his energy and ran quickly, beside the mountaintop was a magnificent great temple.

He quickly drew near, a plaque in front of the temple reads "MinZhong Temple Built According To Imperial Edict".

He did not have time to look at the temple, he chased after the scorch mark. The mark bypassed the temple side and led to the back of the temple. He heard the sound of wooden fish and chanting of scriptures inside the temple, the monks were carrying out their prayer sessions. He was wearing an iron mask, he felt ashamed and fearful of being seen by the monks, thus he followed the foot of the wall and quietly travelled, he saw the scorch mark passed through a big mud ground and reached a vegetable garden, he prayed that the silkworm was eating vegetable and he will be able to sneak behind and capture it, as he got near the fence of the garden, he heard someone cursing loudly, he stopped advancing.

He heard the person rebuked loudly: "Why don't you abide by the rules, sneaking out alone to play? You made me worried for half a day, I feared that you will never return again. I brought you afar from the Kunlun Mountains, you are too ungrateful, you don't know the trouble and pains I went through. If you continue like this, you won't have any future prospect, you will destroy your own future and no one will pity you." Although the voice was very angry, it also possessed compassion and expectation, it seemed to be a father lecturing his unruly child.

You TanZhi pondered: "He talked about Kunlun Mountains and bringing him from far away place, most likely a master or elder, not father." He quietly moved beside the fence, he saw the person was a monk. The monk was really fat, his stature short, he resembled a big meat ball, his finger pointing the ground, reprimanding endlessly. You TanZhi looked at the ground, he was surprised and happy, the monk was reprimanding a silkworm.

The appearance of the monk was already very strange, but talking to the silkworm, it's even more bizarre. The silkworm was moving on the ground rapidly, it seemed to be trying to escape but it keep running into some kind of invisible wall and it turned around immediately. You TanZhi

focused his gaze, there was a yellow circle on the ground, the silkworm rushed left and moved right but it can't escape the circle, he immediately understood: "The circle is drawn using some medicinal herb, this medicine must be that silkworm's black-star."

The monk scolded for a while, he retrieved something from his bosom and gnawed on it, it's a cooked lamb head, he ate with relish, he picked up a gourd near the pillar, unplugged it, lifted his neck and drank from it endlessly.

You TanZhi caught a whiff of alcohol, he knew the gourd contained wine, he thought: "So he's a monk that eat meat and drink wine. It seemed he raised this silkworm, he treasured and loved it very much, so how should I go about stealing it?"

As he was pondering, he heard someone shout from the other end of the garden: "Huijing, Huijing!" When the fat monk heard it, he had a huge shock, he quickly hid the meat and gourd in a pile of rice straw, the person continued to shout: " Huijing, Huijing, you didn't attend the prayer session, where have you been hiding?" The fat monk quickly grabbed a nearby hoe and started digging the garden, he replied: "I am planting vegetables." The man came over, he's a middle-aged monk, he said coldly: "Everyone has to attend morning and night prayer sessions! You can dig the fields anytime, why did you choose to dig during night prayer sessions? Go, go quickly! Finish the prayer session before coming back here to dig the field. Since you are at MinZhong Temple, you have to observe the rules and regulations here. Your Shaolin Temple don't have any rules and regulations?" Huijing replied: "Yes!" He put down the hoe and followed him, he did not turn back to look at the silkworm for fear that the middle-aged monk will notice it.

You TanZhi pondered: "So this short-fat monk is from Shaolin Temple, all the monks from Shaolin know martial arts, I have to be extra careful since I am stealing his silkworm." When the two of them was far away, the

surrounding was quiet, he squeezed through the bamboo fence, he saw the silkworm moving swiftly in the yellow circle, he thought: "How to catch it?" After a while he suddenly came up with an idea, he retrieved the gourd from the haystack and gave it a shake, there's still half a gourd of wine, he drank a few mouthfuls and poured the rest onto the vegetable plot, he placed the rim of the gourd on the ground and slowly move it near the yellow circle. When the gourd rim just moved past the yellow circle, the silkworm gave a "Chi" sound and went into the gourd. You TanZhi was elated, he quickly replaced the stopper and sealed the gourd, he carried the gourd with both hand and squeezed out of the bamboo fence, after walking for a while he quickly ran and escaped.

After leaving MinZhong Temple for ten zhang, he felt the gourd was unusually cold, it's even colder than ice, he transferred the gourd from his right hand to his left hand, and then from his left to right, the cold was really chilling to the bone, the gourd can't be held constantly. Without any good idea, he placed the gourd on top of his head, this was even worse, cold air spread through the iron mask, his head was freezing and it felt extremely painful, it was as if the blood in his body was about to turn to ice. The pressing situation gave rise to a bright idea, he took off his belt and tied it around the gourd, holding the belt in his hand, the belt cannot transmit cold and thus he was able to hold onto it. But the gourd still gave off cold air, after a while a layer of frost formed on the gourd surface.



## Chapter 29: Bug Congealing Cold, Palm Shooting Frost

Fan translation by d4rksinz [Second Edition]

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You TanZhi carried the gourd and travelled quickly back to Nanjing, he reported back to AhZi, saying that he has caught the frost silkworm.

AhZi was overjoyed, she ordered him to rear the silkworm in the clay urn, currently it was mid-summer, the weather was burning hot, but when the frost silkworm was being kept in the urn, the Palace gradually got colder and colder, not long after, even the teapots, cups and the tea water all turned into ice. During one night You TanZhi shivered in his bed, he was freezing and could not sleep, he thought: "This silkworm is really strange, it is rarely seen in this world. If Miss really let it suck my blood, even if I don't get poison, I will also freeze to death."

AhZi caught several poisonous snakes and bugs to fight with the silkworm, the silkworm simply moved around and all the bugs froze to death, the silkworm feasted on their juices, this went on for ten days, not a single poisonous bug was able to resist. One day AhZi came into the main hall of the Palace and said: "Iron Clown, we will kill this silkworm today, go stick your hand into the urn and let the silkworm suck your blood!"

You TanZhi was worried about this day, when he's dreaming at night, he feared this exact moment, eventually AhZi did not show any mercy and wanted to sacrifice him along with the frost silkworm, his heart was dejected, he gazed at AhZi, he did not move or reply.

AhZi pondered: "I acquired this treasure by accident, the poison palm skill I am training now, it might be even more powerful than my master." She said: "Stick your hand into

the urn!" You TanZhi was tearful, he knelt and kowtowed, he said: "Miss, when you mastered this poison palm, please don't forget your subordinate who died for you. My surname is You, my name is TanZhi, I am not Iron Clown." AhZi smiled and said: "Fine, you are called You TanZhi, I will remember it, you are very loyal to me, very good, you are a loyal and devoted lackey!"

You TanZhi listened to her praise, he felt comforted, he gave another two kowtows and said: "Thank you Miss!" but he was not willing to give up without a fight, immediately he flipped his body upside down, his head went between his legs, his left hand clutched his leg, right hand reached into the urn, in his mind he is thinking about the small arrowheads on the two words beside the monk in the book's drawing, suddenly he felt an itch on his index finger, a stream of cold energy shot out like an arrow, it started from his arm and swiftly went to his chest, You TanZhi kept thinking about the direction of the small arrowheads, the stream of cold energy followed the meridian path directed by his thoughts, it went from his finger to his arm, and from his chest to the top of his head, the cold energy chilled him to his bones wherever it goes.

AhZi saw his odd posture, she found it funny, after a long time, he still maintained the posture, she became curious and approach his body, the frost silkworm was still biting his index finger. The frost silkworm body was transparent like crystal, she saw a thread of blood entering its mouth, it pass by its left body , made a u-turn, and pass by its right body and back to its mouth, flowing back into You TanZhi index finger.

After a while, a thin layer of frost formed on You TanZhi's iron mask, clothes and limbs, AhZi pondered: "He must be dead. A living person will have body heat, how can frost form on him?" but she saw the blood still circulating within the frost silkworm, apparently it's still sucking blood, suddenly, wisps of hot steam issued from the frost silkworm.

In the midst of her surprise, there was a gentle clattering sound, the frost silkworm fell off You TanZhi's index finger. AhZi had already prepared a stick, she rammed down hard. She thought this super natural frost silkworm would not die with this one stroke, but who knew that when it fell into the urn, its belly faced the sky, it just stayed there and did not turn around. The silkworm was pounded into pulp in one move.

AhZi rejoiced and quickly stuck her hand into the urn, she stuffed the silkworm's fluid and blood onto both her palm, closed her eyes, circulated her energy and absorbed all the blood and fluids.

She channeled for half a day, stretched out her hands and stood up, she saw You TanZhi was still upside down his head between his legs, body covered with frost. She was extremely astonished, she reached out and touched his body, his hands emitted a strange coldness, his clothes frozen stiff. She was shocked but found it funny at the same time, she summoned the attendant and ordered him to bury You TanZhi.

The attendant led a few Khitan soldiers and they put You TanZhi's corpse on a horse carriage, they went outside the city. AhZi did not instruct them to give a proper burial, thus the attendant did not bother to dig a grave and simply threw the corpse into a small brook then they went back to the city.

This act of laziness from the attendant actually saved You TanZhi's life. When You TanZhi was bitten by the silkworm, he immediately used the energy circulation method from the [Tendon-Changing Sutra], the poison gas was neutralized, his blood was suck by the frost silkworm and returned back into his finger and the deadly frost poison of the silkworm was absorbed by him. Thus, the blood and fluids absorbed by AhZi was completely ineffective and she wasted her effort. If You TanZhi had completely mastered the energy circulation method of [Tendon-Changing Sutra], he would be

able to slowly neutralize the frost poison absorbed by him and greatly increased his internal energy, but he only learnt one method, thus he can't expel the poison. The strange frost poison was the number one most Yin and cold element in the world, it froze his body solid immediately.

If the attendant really buried him in the soil, even after a few hundred years, he might not defrost and might not actually die. Currently his body was submerged in water, it slowly flowed downwards, after around ten li, the creek made a turn and his body was trapped by reeds at the side. After a while, the water surrounding his body all turned into ice, forming a crystal coffin. Water continued to rush and wash over him, bit by bit the cold air washed away, eventually the ice covering his body started to melt.

Luckily, he's wearing an iron mask on his head. Iron transfers heat and cold quickly, thus ice covering his mask melted first. Water rushed onto his head and he started coughing, he was conscious and clear headed again, he climbed out of the brook, "Ding Dang" sound came from his body, evidently he still carried a lot of ice on his body. Initially when his body froze, he did not lose consciousness, but he was stuck in the ice and could not move. After being frozen for a long period of time he lost consciousness, now that he safely escaped, he felt as if he just woke up from a long dream.

He sat by the side of the brook, he thought about his loyalty and devotion to AhZi, he willingly risked his body to feed poisonous bugs to help her practice her skills, but when he died, AhZi did not even give a sigh, looking out from within the ice, he saw her beam with pleasure and took all the silkworm's fluid and blood, spread it on her palm and practice her skills, she only looked sideways at him, thinking that he died in a fun and strange way, there wasn't the slightest bit of pity from her.

He pondered: "This frost silkworm is exceptionally poisonous, it's worth more than a thousand poisonous bugs

and snakes, after absorbing the poison into her palm, Miss will naturally master her poison palm. If I go back and see her ..." Suddenly, his body trembled, his heart grew cold and he thought: "Once she sees me, she will definitely test her poison on me. If she mastered the poison palm, she will naturally kill me with one stroke. If she has yet to master it, she will definitely ask me to catch more poisonous bugs and snake until she mastered her palm, until she can kill me with a single palm stroke. I will die either way, why should I even go back?"

He stood up and jumped a few times, shaking off all the ice on his body, he thought: "Where should I go?"

He dared not seek Qiao Feng for revenge anymore. At the moment he's undecided, he wandered around the wilderness and mountains, picking wild berries and catching birds and small beasts for food. During the night on the second day, he felt bored, he took out the Sanskrit [Tendon-Changing Sutra], he thought of following the posture of the monk in the drawing.

The book was completely soaked, he flipped the page cautiously for fear that he might damage the page, but he was surprised as he saw drawings of the monk on every single page, their postures all different. After some deep contemplation, he finally understood, the drawings will only appear when wet, he was not save by Buddha. Starting from the first page, he copied the posture, when he thought about the small red arrowhead on the strange words, he felt a faint thread of cold ice traveling around his limbs and bones, it was as if the frost silkworm was alive and crawling in his body. He became fearful and quickly stood up, the frost silkworm inside his body vanished immediately.

For four hours he kept thinking: "The frost silkworm inside my body, has it left?" but he can't touch, feel or even track it, he couldn't bear it anymore and started to imitate the odd posture and contemplate on the small red arrowhead on the strange words, after a while, the frost

silkworm started crawling inside his body again. He gave a loud cry and stopped contemplating on the arrowhead, the frost silkworm vanish again, when he started to think about the arrowhead, the frost silkworm crawled again.

Every time, when the frost silkworm crawled, his body felt comfortable and unrestricted. The book contained many different postures of naked monk, the small arrowhead on the strange words twisted and turned, its variation complicated. He followed the various different postures to activate the frost silkworm, he felt cool yet warm, he was comfortable and at ease.

Time flew and a few months passed, when capturing beasts he felt his hands and feet becoming lighter and more nimble, he leaped and jumped farther, his running speed greatly exceeded what he was capable of in the past.

On a certain evening, a hungry wolf came out to hunt for food, it pounced towards him. You TanZhi was shocked and fled quickly, the claws of the wolf had already reached his shoulders, it exposed its fangs and bit towards his throat. He panicked and randomly threw out a palm, hitting the wolf on the top of its head. The wolf rolled and twisted a few times and stopped moving. You TanZhi turned around and moved back a few zhang, he saw the wolf did not move at all, feeling curious he picked up a stone and casted it out, the stone hit the wolf's body but it still did not move at all. He was pleasantly surprised and went over to inspect, the wolf was dead. He never expected this effortless palm stroke from him had this much power, he turned and inspected his palm repeatedly but did not see anything special, he cannot help but cry out: "The spirit of the frost silkworm has shown itself!"

He thought that when the frost silkworm died, its spirit resided within his body, resulting in his amazing feat, he did not realize it was purely due to his [Tendon-Changing Sutra], in addition the frost silkworm possesses one of the deadliest poison in the world, this Yin-poison had been absorbed by

him, combined with the superior internal energy cultivated by the [Tendon-Changing Sutra], his internal energy contained an extremely fierce Yin-strength.

The [Tendon-Changing Sutra] was the most treasured supreme manual of martial studies, but its cultivation method was extremely difficult, it required the dissolution of distinction between self and others, in addition, the practitioner must not have the slightest desire to learn the martial arts of the sutra. But only first-class martial monks will get the chance to practice the sutra, all of them were valiant and eager for success, who doesn't want to master the sutra as soon as possible and reap its benefits? Hence, it's extremely difficult for them to not have the slightest desire to learn the sutra.

For several hundred years, many Shaolin eminent monks practiced the [Tendon-Changing Sutra], but years after years of diligent practice yielded negligible results, thus all the monks thought the sutra was wholly ineffective, when the sutra was stolen by AhZhu, although the eminent monks were extremely angry yet they did not consider it to be a major loss.

One hundred years ago, Shaolin Temple had a monk, this person became a monk since childhood, he's dull-witted and crazy. His teacher could not master the [Tendon-Changing Sutra] and threw it away in anger. The crazy monk picked up the book thrown by his teacher, he laughed and practiced the contents, eventually he became a top martial art expert of his generation. Although his martial arts were outstanding, till his death, he did not know the exact reason, and nobody knew it was due to the [Tendon-Changing Sutra]. You TanZhi did not have the desire to learn martial arts, he followed the methods in the sutra purely for the sake of activating the frost silkworm within his body as he found it fun and interesting, unwittingly his martial arts improved day by day, he followed the exact same route taken by the crazy monk many years ago.

Days later, he killed several more wild beasts, he knew his palm strength was exceedingly strong and he became bolder, he kept on travelling south, he feared that if he does not summon the frost silkworm spirit for a single day, the “silkworm spirit” will automatically leave him, thus he used his palm everyday and dared not stop. The “silkworm spirit” was marvelous and strange and always came when summoned.

You TanZhi drifted south, on this day he reached the borders of Henan province in Central Plains. He knew his iron head will scare people off, thus during the day he rested in caves within wild forests, as night fell, he came out and stole food from homes. His body was exceptionally agile and nobody detected him.

On this day, he was sleeping in a small dilapidated temple beside the road, suddenly, he heard the sound of footsteps, three people entered the temple.

He quickly hid behind a shrine as he dared not let others see his appearance. When the trio entered the temple, they sat down immediately and started chatting. The trio rambled and talked about gossips in the martial world, suddenly a person asked: “Where do you think Qiao Feng is hiding, one year has passed but we didn’t even hear a single news about him?”

When You TanZhi heard the word “Qiao Feng”, his heart grew cold, he immediately paid attention to their conversation. Another person replied: “He committed all sorts of evils, he felt guilty and hid himself, I guess we will never see him again.” The first person said: “It might not be true. He’s biding his time, once someone is down and out, he will strike immediately. Do your math, after the battle at JuXian manor, he killed how many people? Elder Xu, Grandpa and Grandma Tan, Zhao QianSun, Taishan Iron-Face Judge and his entire family, Tiantai Mountain Monk ZhiGuang, Beggars Clan Madame Ma, Elder Bai Shijing, sigh, countless lives!”



When You TanZhi heard the word “Battle at JuXian Manor”, his heart ached and he lost his interest in the conversation, after a while, he heard a hoarse voice said: “Clan leader Qiao has always been benevolent and righteous, I never expected...sigh...I never expected, this is all predestined fate. Let us just go.” He finished speaking and stood up.

Another person said: “Old Wang, you said our Clan is recommending someone to be the new Clan leader, who is it?” The hoarse voice replied: “I don’t know! We have been recommending numerous people for over a month, but we just can’t find a suitable hero that can gain the respect of the entire Clan, sigh, we can only wait and see.” Another person said: “I can read your mind, you are hoping that Qiao Feng will come back and be our Clan leader again. You better abandon that idea and stop dreaming, if these words reach Hall-Master Quan, your life cannot be guaranteed.” Old Wang got anxious, he said: “Xiao Bi, you said these words yourself, when did I say I want Clan leader Qiao to be our Clan leader again?” Xiao Bi sneered: “You still address him as Clan leader Qiao, you dare say you don’t want him to be the Clan leader again?” Old Wang raged: “If you keep spewing nonsense I will beat you to death.” The third person stepped in and mediated: “Enough, enough, we are all brothers, let’s not spoil the relationship. How can Qiao Feng become our Clan leader again? He’s a Khitan dog, everyone will fight till death if they see him again. Moreover, even if we invite him to be our Clan leader, you think he will agree?” Old Wang sighed and said: “You are right.” As he finished the trio left the temple.

You TanZhi pondered: “The Beggar Clan is searching everywhere for Qiao Feng but they can’t find him, how would they know he’s already the Lord of Southern Chancellery in Liao Empire. I will tell them this information. The Beggar Clan have overwhelming numbers, along with a few experts from Central Plains, we might be able to kill that

traitor. I will follow them and kill Qiao Feng.” When he thought about returning to Nanjing he thought of seeing AhZi again, his chest immediately heated up like an oven.

He tiptoed out of the temple, he saw the three Beggar Clan members walked on the road and heading west, he followed behind quietly. It’s already dusk, there was no one around, he travelled for a few li and came to a low-lying land, he looked to the distant and saw a bonfire within the mountain valley, You TanZhi pondered: “My iron mask is very strange, they will make a mountain out of a molehill if they see me, I should hide within the vegetation and eavesdrop.” He jumped into the grass bush and slowly crawled towards the bonfire. He crawled for a few zhang and stopped, he gradually crawled closer again, but he heard a huge commotion, a large number of people gathered at the bonfire. You TanZhi experienced great sufferings recently, he dared not be careless, as he got closer to the bonfire he crawled even slower, he crawled behind a large rock and was separated a few zhang from the bonfire, he dared not move closer anymore, he laid low and listen.

Among the crowd by the bonfire, someone spoke. You TanZhi listened for a while, it seemed to be members from the Hall of Great Wisdom of the Beggar Clan, they gathered here to discuss who to recommend as the next Clan leader. Some pushed for Elder Song, some pushed for Elder Wu. Another person said: “Speaking of wits and courage, we should recommend Hall-Master Quan, unfortunately Hall-Master Quan was expelled by Qiao Feng, we still haven’t settled how to let him rejoin the Clan again.” Another person replied: “The treacherous affair of Qiao Feng was exposed by Hall-Master Quan, he rendered a huge service to our Clan, it should be easy to let him rejoin. Once the General Assembly starts, we will first settle the matter of letting Hall-Master Quan rejoin the Clan, we will bring up his great contribution and then recommend him as the next Clan leader.”

A cool and bright voice said: "It's possible for me to rejoin the Clan. But you cannot recommend me for the position of Clan leader, people might gossip and say that I expose Qiao Feng for selfish reason of displacing him as the next Clan leader." A person said loudly: "Hall-Master Quan is a person who does not shirk responsibility. Although our Clan Elders have better martial arts, but when it comes to resourcefulness, no one can be compared to you. Against Qiao Feng, we can only pit our wits against him, not force, so Hall-Master Quan ....." Hall-Master Quan replied: "Brother Shi, I have yet to officially rejoin the Clan, you can't call me Hall-Master Quan."

Two hundred beggars around the bonfire chipped in: "Elder Song has instructed, temporarily, you are still Hall-Master, so why can't we call you Hall-Master Quan? In the future when you become the Clan leader, you no longer need to care about this Hall-Master position."

"Even if Hall-Master Quan does not become the Clan leader, at least you can be promoted to Clan Elder, and you can still continue to lead your former Hall."

"Correct, even if Hall-Master Quan becomes the Clan leader, you can still take up additional responsibility as Great Wisdom Hall-Master."

As the crowd was getting lively, a Clan member came from the entrance of the valley and said: "Reporting to Hall-Master, Prince Duan from Dali Kingdom is requesting an audience." Hall-Master Quan immediately stood up and said: "Prince Duan from Dali Kingdom? Our Clan normally does not have dealings with Dali Kingdom. Brothers, the Duan family from Dali is well known for its martial arts, since Prince Duan is personally requesting an audience, everyone should go and greet him." He led all the members to the valley's entrance.

A young man stood smiling at the entrance, he's accompanied by seven to eight people. This young man was Duan Yu. Both men cupped their hands and paid their

respects, they met each other before at the apricots forest in WuXi. At that time, Quan GuanQing did not know Duan Yu's identity, but his embarrassing affair of being expelled by Qiao Feng was seen by Duan Yu, he cannot help but feel slightly embarrassed, but he immediately calmed down, saluted and said: "I didn't expect Prince Duan to come visit, you came from such a far place, I ask for your forgiveness."

Duan Yu smiled and said: "It's fine, it's fine. Junior receives orders from my father to inform your honorable Clan of a certain matter, I hope it won't be an inconvenience."

Both of them exchanged a few pleasantries, Duan Yuan was accompanied by Gu DuCheng, Fu SiGui and Zhu DanChen. Quan GuanQing invited Duan Yu to sit down on a rock by the bonfire, Clan members brought and served wine.

Duan Yu took a drink and said: "A few months ago, my father was at the residence of Deputy-leader Ma in XinYang, he encountered a strange affair, he personally witnessed the death of Bai Shijing from your honorable Clan. But my father had sustained some injuries, he is still recuperating, the movement of your Clan's Elders is not fix and we did not have the opportunity to meet them, thus my father could not present the letter he wrote. A few days ago, we heard that your Hall is gathering here and I was ordered to come here quickly." He retrieved a letter from within his sleeve, quickly stood up and presented it.

Quan GuanQing also stood up immediately and received it with both hands, he said: "I am sorry to have troubled Gentleman Duan to personally deliver this letter, I thank Prince Duan for showing great concern to my humble Clan." He saw the letter was sealed, it bore the word: "To Be Personally Opened By Beggar Clan's Elders", he knew that it was not appropriate for him to open the letter, he said: "Our Clan will be holding a General Assembly soon, all the old and young will be coming, I will then personally present

Prince Duan's letter to our Clan's Elders." Duan Yu said: "I am sorry to trouble you, junior will take his leave now."

Quan GuanQing quickly said his thanks and said: "Our Clan's Elder Bai and Madame Ma died under the treacherous hands of Qiao Feng, Prince Duan personally witness this matter?" Duan Yu shook his head and said: "Elder Bai and Madame Ma was not killed by my Big Brother Qiao, Deputy-leader Ma was harmed by someone else. My father explained all these in the letter, Hall-Master Quan will know the full details in the future after reading the letter." Duan Yu thought: "This matter cannot be explained with just a few phrases, you are not a good person, I don't need to waste time and explain it to you. I don't think you have the guts to hide my father's letter." He cupped his hands towards Quan GuanQing and said: "Till next time, you don't have to see us off."

He turned around and walked to the valley's entrance, he met two Beggar Clan members and two men.

The two men gave each other a look, they moved a few steps forward and bowed towards Duan Yu, they presented a red invitation card.

Duan Yu took it and perused it, the card wrote the words:

"Su XingHe respectfully invites all the world's most talented chess player, on the eighth day of the second lunar month, to be at Henan's LeiGu Mountain to play chess" He said: "Excellent, junior is not burdened with any important matters, I will definitely be at the chess meet. But how did you two find out that I can play chess?" The expression of the two man were delighted, "Yi Yi Ya Ya" sound came from their mouth, they made huge gestures, it seemed both of them were mute. Duan Yu could not understand their gestures, he smiled and asked Zhu DanChen: "LeiGu Mountain is not far from here right?" and he handed the invitation card to him.

Zhu DanChen took a look at the card, he cupped his hands towards the two men and said: "The son of Prince

ZhenNan of Dali pays his respect to Mr. Intelligent, he expresses his gratitude and he will promptly visit at the appointed date.” He pointed his hand at Duan Yu and made a few gestures.

The two men bowed again to pay their respects to Duan Yu, they took out another red invitation card and presented it to Quan GuanQing.

Quan GuanQing took a look at the card, he respectfully gave it back to the man, he waved his hands and said: “Quan GuanQing from the Hall of Great Wisdom of the Beggar Clan pays his respects to Mr. Intelligent, my chess skill is shoddy and laughable, I dare not go to the chess meet, I hope that Mr. Intelligent will be understanding.” The two men bowed towards him then bowed towards Duan Yu again and they left.

Only now did Zhu DanChen answered Duan Yu’s question: “ LeiGu Mountain is to the south of SongXian, North-east of QuYuan Ridge, it’s not far from here.”

Duan Yuan took his leave from Quan GuanQing and exited the valley, he asked Zhu DanChen: “What kind of person is Mr. Intelligent Su XingHe? Is he the national Go (Chess) champion of Central Plains?” Zhu DanChen replied: “Mr. Intelligent is also known as the Deaf Mute Old Man.”

Duan Yu gave an “Ah” sound, he heard his father and uncle discussing about the ‘Deaf Mute Old Man’ before, he’s a prestigious expert within Central Plains, he’s deaf and mute but his martial arts was exceedingly high, his uncle was extremely respectful when mentioning him. Zhu DanChen continued: “The Deaf Mute Old Man is disabled, but he insist on calling himself Mr. Intelligent, it seems he thinks his wits and penmanship will beat people’s hearing and debating skills.” Duan Yu nodded his head and said: “It seems reasonable.” After walking a few steps he gave a long sigh.

He listened to Zhu DanChen say that the Deaf Mute Old Man’s wits and penmanship will beat people’s hearing and

debating skills, he cannot help but thought of Wang YuYan's "Narration Martial Art" beating people's fist and weaponry skills.

After rescuing the Beggar Clan members in WuXi with AhZhu, Bao BuTong and Feng BoE arrived and met up with them, the five of them headed north to search for their Young Master Murong. Duan Yu naturally wanted to follow them. Feng BoE was grateful towards him for sucking the scorpion's poison and he welcomed Duan Yu. But Bao BuTong was extremely unforgiving, he blamed Duan Yu for disguising as Young Master Murong and tarnishing his great reputation, later he even threatened to beat him up unless he scram, Wang YuYan was only interested in finding her cousin and discussed endlessly with Feng BoE, she turned a blind eye to Duan Yu's situation.

Duan Yu was helpless and could only grudgingly part with Wang YuYan, but he still travelled north and thought: "You guys want to go to Henan to search for Murong Fu, it so happens that I am also going to Henan, Henan province does not belong to your Murong Family, if Murong Fu and Bao BuTong can go, why can't Duan Yu go as well? If it so happens that I run into you guys again, then it must be fate and Mr. Bao cannot blame me."

But fate did not want him to meet Wang YuYan just shortly after their recent parting. During the entire month, Duan Yu wandered around Henan, he termed it sightseeing tour but in actual fact he's just looking around in all direction, hoping to see a strand of hair from Wang YuYang, or just a corner of her clothes, as for the beautiful mountains and sceneries he didn't even give it a glance.

One day, Duan Yu was at the White Horse Temple in LuoYang, he was discussing "Agama" with the abbot, they discussed about Buddhist teachings on "Seven Treasures of the Chakravartin". Duan Yu was interested in the Jade Maiden treasure that was said to be "Neither long nor short, neither black nor white, a body that is warm during winter

and cool during summer". The abbot shook his head repeatedly and said: "Buddhist Duan, this is an analogy in Buddhist teachings, moreover Buddha said that the seven treasures is in impermanence ..." but he did not finish as three men suddenly entered the temple, they were Fu SiGui, Gu DuCheng and Zhu DanChen.

When Duan ZhenChun left the residence of Ma in XinYang, he met up with Ruan XingZhu and recuperated under her care, when he thought about how Xiao Feng was wronged by the Beggar Clan for killing Ma DaYuan, he had to vindicate him, thus he wrote a letter and ordered the trio to deliver it to the Beggar Clan.

Fu SiGui and company came to LuoYang, they did not see any leading figures at Beggar Clan's main Hall, they gathered information and knew that the Hall of Great Wisdom of the Beggar Clan was gathering nearby, they hoped to deliver the letter there, but in a restaurant they heard another amusing news about a daydreaming gentleman, the description of the appearance and behavior of the man seemed to be very similar to Duan Yu, they asked the whereabouts of this gentleman and they came searching in the White Horse Temple.

The four of them met up and was very happy, Duan Yu said: "I will accompany you to deliver the letter, after that quickly bring me to see my father." When he learned that his father was currently in Henan, naturally he's anxious to meet him, but all these days he hoped to hear the slightest news about Wang YuYan, he kept thinking about her day and night, he prayed that he might be able to meet her at the Beggar Clan's gathering, but this hope eventually came to nothing.

Zhu DanChen saw him sighing, he assumed he's thinking about Mu WanQing but he can offer no consolation, he thought of diverting his attention and said: "That Mr. Intelligent is widely distributing these cards and inviting people to play chess, his chess skills must be extremely



high. Young Master, after meeting Prince ZhenNan, why don't you go and meet this Mr. Intelligent and play a few rounds with him?"

Duan Yu nodded: "Yes, playing chess can relieve your worries. But although she is familiar with all the martial arts and all the weaponries, she can't play chess. She definitely won't go to Mr. Intelligent's chess meet."

Zhu DanChen was baffled, he did not know who Duan Yu was referring to, along the way Duan Yu was absent-minded, his speech incoherent, and he dared not inquire anymore.

The group travelled north-west. Duan Yu was frowning and suddenly he nodded and smiled, muttering: "There's a saying in Buddhist scripture: Thinking about beauty, her body filled with blood, a hundred years later, turning into bone and dust', although the saying is true but even if she turns into bones after a hundred years, she's still an incredibly beautiful bone." As he fantasized about Wang YuYan's skeleton, he suddenly heard the sound of horse's hoof behind him, two people came galloping on horses, but he can't see their appearance clearly in the darkness.

The two horses seemed to be out of control, they rushed towards the group. Fu SiGui and Gu DuCheng stretched out their hands and they each reined in the horses, the riders of the horses were motionless. Fu SiGui was slightly surprised, he leaned over to check, the first rider turned out to be the messenger of Mr. Intelligent, his face revealed a faint smile but he died long ago. Just a few moments ago, this man had personally delivered the invitation card to Duan Yu, how did he die for no reason? The other dead rider was also the messenger of Mr. Intelligent, he also died with a strange smile. When Fu SiGui and the rest saw this they knew these two men must have been killed by an extremely deadly poison, they quickly reined in their horses and moved back two steps, they dared not touch the corpses.

Duan Yu was furious: "That Hall-Master Quan from Beggar Clan is really vicious, why did he harm these men? Let's go

and reason it out with him.” He turned his horse around and was about to go find Quan GuanQing and interrogate him.

Suddenly a voice spoke out within the darkness: “Little boy you are ignorant, in the entire world except for the Divine Elder of XingXiu and his sect, who has the ability to kill without leaving a trace? It will be fine if the Deaf Mute Old Man obediently hides himself, if he dares come out, Divine Elder of XingXiu will never let him survive, kid, this matter is none of your concern, it’s best if you leave quickly.”

Zhu DanChen whispered: “Young Master, this is the affair of XingXiu Sect, it does not concern us, let's go.”

Duan Yu already lost his interest when he can’t find Wang YuYan, if these messengers were in danger he would definitely step in and save them, but since they already died he did not want to stir up more trouble, he sighed and said: “It’s not sufficient to be deaf, their eyes must not see anything, their nose can’t smell any scent, their mind incapable of any thought, only then can they break away from their trouble.”

His speech was referring to Wang YuYan, since he already heard her voice, saw her smile and movement, all these etched deeply into his mind, even if he was deaf and mute, he still can’t break away from thinking about her. Unexpectedly, the man laughed and applauded: “Yes, Yes! You are right, I should prod their eyes blind, cut off their nose, and beat them up so badly that they can’t even think.”

Duan Yu gave another sigh: “It’s useless to use external force. You need to cultivate your inner self, ‘Do not allow color, sound and smell to stir your heart’, but if you can let go of all self, you already reached Buddhahood. I am only a layman, how can I reach such attainment? Resentment, hate, love, parting, powerless, the five evils, the great sufferings of life.”

You TanZhi was hiding behind the vegetation, he saw Duan Yu and his entourage come and go, someone was shouting in front, two Beggars Clan members quickly ran over and quietly reported to Quan GuanQing: "Hall-Master Quan, the two mute men died for no reason, the perpetrator claims he's from XingXiu Sect and he's a subordinate of someone called Divine Elder of XingXiu."

Quan GuanQing got a huge shock, his expression changed instantly. He heard of the Old Freak of XingXiu, this person employs deadly poison, his martial art was also exceedingly high, he pondered: "He killed the messenger of Deaf Mute Old Man, this matter does not concern us, it's best if we don't stir up any trouble." He replied: "Ok, they are ghost, fighting another ghost, we need not bother."

Suddenly, someone spoke in front of him: "Scoundrel talking nonsense, how dare you curse me as ghost when you know I am the subordinate of the Divine Elder of XingXiu? You are tired of living." Quan GuanQing was surprised and he cannot refrain from taking a step back, under the light from the torch, he saw someone standing upright in front of him but it was his own subordinate from Beggar Clan, he fixed his concentration and finally saw him, the person had a faint smile, his appearance strange, he was standing right behind another person, he shouted: "Who are you, pretending to be a ghost, what are you doing here?"

The person behind the Beggar Clan member replied: "You are really bold, you said the word ghost again! I am the subordinate of the Divine Elder of XingXiu. Divine Elder of XingXiu is arriving in Central Plains, he needs two hundred poisonous snakes and one hundred poisonous bugs. Your Beggar Clan is always well-stocked with poisonous snakes and bugs, offer them immediately. Divine Elder of XingXiu will spare you lot of beggars if you respectfully present the items to him. Or else, heng heng, you will become like this person!"

Bang, the Beggar Clan member in front of him immediately flew off and fell beside the bonfire, he was motionless, apparently he died long ago. When the Beggar Clan member flew off, a dwarf wearing poplin shirt was revealed, nobody knows how he killed the Beggar Clan member and then hid himself behind the Clan member.

Quan GuanQing was startled and angry, in a split second, many thoughts came into his mind: "Old Freak of XingXiu mess with our Beggar Clan, if we don't give in to their demands we have to fight it out. Although it's dangerous, but if I cave in to his threats and offer the poisonous snakes and bugs, my Clan members will forever look down on me. My hopes of becoming Clan leader will be dashed, I can't even maintain my current standings in the Clan. Luckily the Old Freak of XingXiu has yet to arrive, this person is alone, I don't need to be afraid of him." Immediately he laughed and said: "So you are from XingXiu Sect, may I know your name?"

The dwarf said: "I am called Tian LangZi. Quickly go and prepare the poisonous snakes and bugs."

Quan GuanQing smiled and said: "It's only poisonous snakes and bugs, small matter, we don't need any major preparation." He picked up a bag from the ground and said: "There's a few snakes here, please check it, is it suitable for the Divine Elder of XingXiu?"

The dwarf heard Quan GuanQing said "Divine Elder of XingXiu", he was very pleased, seeing his expression was respectful he thought: "It's said that Beggar Clan is the number one clan in Central Plains, but when they heard my master's name they immediately turn limp. I will take these poison snakes, master will definitely like it, he will surely praise me for being competent. Nevertheless, it's all due to the fierce reputation of master." He immediately stretched his neck to look into the bag.

Suddenly all he saw was darkness, the cloth bag had already covered his head, Tian LangZi was shocked, he

immediately struck out with his palm but he hit nothing, but at this moment, his cheek and neck felt a slight pain, he was bitten by the poisonous bugs in the bag. Tian LangZi did not have time to remove the cloth bag, he ferociously sent out both his palm and retreated quickly. As his head was covered with the cloth bag he can't see a thing, both his palms were attacking randomly, his face and head received another series of bites, he panicked, he extended his legs and fled, but his legs threaded on empty air, he lost his footing and rolled down the steep slope, with a splashing sound he fell into the river at the bottom of the mountain and got washed away by the current.

Quan GuanQing thought of killing him, he didn't expect him to escape, but the person was stung by poisonous scorpion and subsequently fell into the river, he's mostly probably dead, but since members of XingXiu sect were poison experts they might have special detoxification method, since they lived at XingXiu Sea they would also know how to swim, if the person managed to survive, XingXiu sect will definitely come back and seek revenge. He said to everyone: "At this moment, we can only deploy the giant python formation and stake it out against the Old Freak of XingXiu. Could it be possible that we can't fend for ourselves without Qiao Feng and have to be humiliated by others? XingXiu Sect are experts in using deadly poison, we can't use our weapons and fists against them, we have to use poison to counter their poison."

The Beggar Clan members shouted out in agreement, immediately they dispersed, they arranged into their battle formation a few zhang away from the bonfire, everyone sat down and crossed their legs.

You TanZhi saw Quan GuanQing used the cloth bag to defeat Tian LangZi, he pondered: "There's probably numerous poisonous bugs in the bag, they have so many bags here, are they all filled with poisonous bugs? It's not surprising for the beggars to be proficient in catching

poisonous bugs. If I can steal a few of these bags and present them to Miss AhZi, she will definitely like it very much.”

Once the Clan members sat down, they did not make any sound, everyone had a few cloth bags beside them, some of the bags were extremely huge, some had creatures squirming and moving inside, You TanZhi’s hair stood on its end when he saw all these. The atmosphere was silent, if he move now he will surely be detected by the crowd, he thought: “I won’t be afraid if they cover me with those bags, I have the protection of the iron mask, but if they stuff my entire body into the bag then I will be in trouble.”

After a few hours, nothing happened, after a while the sun started to rise, covering the hills and vegetation with bright light. Birds were chirping on the trees, suddenly Quan GuanQing said softly: “They are here! Everyone be careful!” He was kneeling on a rock outside the formation, holding onto an iron flute.

Music came from the north direction, a group of people walked unhurriedly, they were playing their wood instruments and drums, the music was melodious and pleasant. You TanZhi pondered: “Is it a wedding procession?”

The music got nearer and nearer, when it was ten zhang away it stopped, several people said in unison: “Divine Elder of XingXiu arriving in Central Plains, Beggar Clan members, kneel down and greet him!” Once they finished, the drums started thundering. After three rounds of drum roll, there was a gong sound, the drums stopped, ten people said in unison: “We respectfully invite Divine Elder of XingXiu to display your great skills, subdue these demons and clowns from Beggar Clan!”

You TanZhi pondered: “It’s quite similar to Taoist ritual.” He quietly peered out from the rock, he saw twenty people lining up in the northwest corner, some holding percussion instruments, some armed with long streamers and banners, red and green colors, pleasing to the eye, from afar the

banners were embroidered with words such as, “Divine Elder of XingXiu “,”Almighty”, “Limitless Power”, “Inspiring Awe Throughout The World”, etc. As the music played out, an old man slowly strolled out, a dozen people arranged into two rows, they followed behind him, separated by a few zhang.

The old man was waving a goose feathered fan, sun shone on his face, his face was ruddy, head full of white hair, three silver whiskers on his chin, he really looked like an immortal depicted in pictures. The old man walked towards the Beggar Clan crowd and stopped moving when he’s three zhang away, suddenly he issued a few sharp whistle, he flicked his fan and waved away the whistle sound, four Beggar Clan members sitting on the ground immediately collapsed.

You TanZhi had a huge shock: “This Divine Elder of XingXiu really have powerful magic!”

The old man’s face revealed a faint smile, with another “Zi” sound, he waved his feathered fan and another group of beggars collapsed. The old man’s whistle seemed to be hiding some kind of lethal poison, in an instant, another six to seven beggars collapsed.

The crowd behind the old man cried out their praises: “Master’s skill will be remembered throughout all ages! These beggars pit themselves against us, it’s akin to a firefly pitting its light against the sun! Or a mantis blocking a cart, they vastly overrated themselves, laughable, laughable!”

“Master you only need to laugh and chitchat and these demons and clowns will die immediately, such effortless crushing victory, disciple has never seen or heard such thing before.”

“This is a great achievement never seen before in the world, if Master did not reveal it, the people from Central Plains will never know such skills exists.” They kept singing their praises, feeling very smug, they started playing their instruments again.

Suddenly there was a “Xu” sound, Quan GuanQing brought the iron flute to his mouth and started blowing. You TanZhi pondered: “What’s he playing the flute for? Supporting the Divine Elder of XingXiu?” Suddenly noise came from the ground, a few brightly colored large snakes slithered towards the old man. The group of disciples beside the old man shouted: “Snakes, there are poisonous snakes! Master, these snakes seems to be heading towards us!” Numerous poisonous snakes came slithering out of the cloth bags, some were big while others were small, all of them rushed towards the old man and his disciples. The crowd panicked and started screaming and howling randomly.

The disciples of XingXiu sect raised their steel staff, they pounded at the oncoming snakes, the old man’s expression was calm, he still carried on whistling and waving his fan to repel his enemies. Quan GuanQing did not stop blowing his flute, his clan members all shouted to show their support.

More and more snakes gathered, within moments, XingXiu sect members were surrounded by a few hundred snakes, five to six of these snakes are giant pythons. A few giant pythons move near, they coiled their tails and immediately trapped two people, another two men was trapped subsequently. If these XingXiu members turned their back and fled, the snakes will not be able to catch them, but their Master was still fighting and they dared not leave, they can only brandish their weapons and pound randomly, they killed eight to ten snakes but seven to eight of them were also bitten by the snakes. The giant pythons were even more dangerous, their skins were rough and their body thick, they behaved as if nothing had happened when stuck by the steel staff, they coiled their body around the men and constricted, not letting them go. As the flute keep blowing, more giant pythons came out of the cloth bags, there’s already twenty seven to twenty eight of them.

The old man saw the situation was unfavorable, he wanted to move back and attack Quan GuanQing, suddenly



two small snakes bit towards his face. He shouted angrily: "How dare you!" He waved his fan and brought down the two snakes, suddenly he felt something soft coiling around his ankle. He knew he was in trouble and quickly leaped into the air. He heard another "Xu" sound from the flute, four pythons raised their tails and coiled towards him. The old man was in mid-air, he struck out with both palms, it hit the snake in front and to his left, his body flashed and he landed two zhang away. At this moment, the tail of the third and fourth giant python attacked him simultaneously. Under such pressing situation he exerted his strength and send out another palm, the palm force arrived and one giant python was struck on its head and its brain turned into pulp.

The mass of snakes gushed in like flowing river. The old man killed another three pythons, but his waist and right leg were trapped by two giant pythons. He gathered his internal energy and gave a loud cry, he clawed open the belly of the python on his waist, his body was splashed with blood. But the python was very resilient, even though its belly was split open it endured the pain and constricted even more, the old man's pelvic bone was about to fracture under the pressure. He struggled to break free, but another two giant pythons wrapped themselves around his body, even his arm was trapped, he could not struggle anymore. Seeing such horrifying scene, You TanZhi was so shocked that he could hardly breathe.

Quan GuanQing was very happy, his enemies were all trapped and bound by the giant python, they can no longer resist and they cursed in rage, he stopped playing his flute, he laughed and said: "Old Freak of XingXiu, your XingXiu Sect and my Beggar Clan normally don't mess with each other, why did you provoke us for no reason? How should we settle this?"

This healthy old man was the most hated person in Central Plains, the Old Freak of XingXiu Ding ChunQiu. One of the three treasures of his Sect the [Divine Wooden King

Tripod] was stolen by AhZi, he sent out numerous disciples to hunt her down, even his head-disciple Zhai XingZi was dispatched. But the returning news was always very discouraging. He last heard that AhZi had the backing of Qiao Feng and they heavily injured Zhai XingZi, Ding ChuQiu was shocked and angry, Ding Chunqiu knew the Beggar Clan was the number one clan in Central Plains and they were not easy to deal with, he also heard the Deaf Mute Old Man was particularly active around Xing Lake in recent years, the Deaf Mute Old Man was a thorn in his side and he can never rest in peace with him around, thus he thought of retrieving the [Divine Wooden King Tripod] and then resolve all these matters once and for all, hence he brought his disciples and personally travelled east to Central Plains.

He practiced the [Great Energy Dissolving Skill] and he frequently required poisonous fluids of poison creatures to be smeared on his palm and absorbed into his body, if he does not absorb any poison fluids for seven days, not only will his internal energy decrease, the poison accumulated in his body will also gradually flare up as its not suppressed by new poison, the repercussion is deadly, the [Divine Wooden King Tripod] has a very special scent, coupled with the incense burnt, it will be able to immediately attract poisonous bugs, all poisonous creatures within ten li radius will not be able to resist being attracted by the fragrance.

With this tripod, Ding ChunQiu can catch poisonous bugs without any effort, his [Great Energy Dissolving Skill] naturally become more and more profound. Previously, Ding ChunQiu had a very talented disciple, he imparted his skills to him and taught him the [Great Energy Dissolving Skill], but after some achievements in the skill the disciple became self-conceited and was very disrespectful towards him. Ding ChunQiu subdued the disciple, he did not torture him but merely imprison him within a stone house so that he can't capture any poison bugs, eventually the poison within his body flared up, it was extremely unbearable and he cannot

help but tear his own muscles off to relief himself, he moaned and wailed and eventually died after forty days. Although Ding ChunQiu was delighted, he cannot help but feel fear, he guarded himself and never imparted his [Great Energy Dissolving Skill] to anyone. Thus, Zhai XingZi and the rest of the disciples did not know the skill, AhZi wanted to learn the skill and she had to eavesdrop secretly and also steal the tripod.

AhZi was adept at scheming, when her master had finish absorbing fresh poison she bid him farewell and travelled east, when the Old Freak of XingXiu realized the tripod was stolen, it was already seven days later and AhZi had escaped to a faraway place. She only travelled on remote routes, even though the disciples pursuing her had higher martial arts, their resourcefulness was way inferior to hers and she managed to bluff her way through, she employed numerous decoy tactics and threw off all her pursuers.

The residence of the Old Freak of XingXiu was a gloomy and damp ravine, the area was rich with poisonous bugs and snakes, although the tripod was lost, it was still not too difficult to catch poisonous bugs and replenish his supply of poison, however he can only hope to catch common poison bugs, without the aid of the tripod he can no longer catch rare bugs which possess deadly poison. One matter cause him endless worries, he's afraid that experts from Central Plains might discover the origin of the tripod and they will seek to destroy it, thus he hoped to resolve this matter quickly so that he can stop worrying.

He met a bunch of his disciples at the borders of ShanXi. His head-disciple Zhai XingZi was fortunate to preserve his life but he lost all his martial arts, he was beaten and humiliated by fellow martial-brothers, his second disciple Shi BiRen temporarily took over the post of head-disciple, all the disciples saw their master and was scared of being punished as they failed to complete their task, fortunately the Old Freak of XingXiu needed all the help he can get and he

postponed all punishments and hoped his disciples can redeem themselves by performing a good service.

Along the way, the group inquired about the Beggar Clan. But firstly, their appearance was strange and their behaviors deplorable, no one was willing to reveal the information to them. Secondly, Xiao Feng was in Liao Empire and became the Lord of Southern Chancellery, but people from the martial world did not know about this matter, thus they could not find any news about the Beggar Clan and they can't even find the main branch of the clan.

On this day, Tian LiangZi inadvertently found about the gathering of the Great Wisdom Hall of Beggar Clan, he wanted to claim credit for this piece of information and he infiltrated the Beggar Clan alone, but he eventually fell prey to Quan GuanQing's schemes. Luckily his body already contained essence of poison and the scorpion's poison failed to kill him, he escaped and reported the matter to his master. Ding ChunQiu immediately rushed over, but he did not expect that with his deadly poison and profound martial arts, he was subdued by giant pythons and immobilized.

Ding Chunqiu did not answer Quan GuanQing's question, he said coldly: "There's a person called Qiao Feng in your Beggar Clan, where is he? Quickly ask him to come out and see me." Quan GuanQing heart was shaken, he asked: "You want to see Qiao Feng, what for?" Ding ChunQiu said proudly: "Divine Elder of XingXiu is asking you a question why aren't you answering? You keep asking useless questions, where is Qiao Feng?"

Quan GuanQing saw Ding ChunQiu was immobilized by the python, he had already lost the power to resist, but his manner was still arrogant and ferocious, such courage was really rare in this world, he said: "It's said that the Old Freak of XingXiu is all knowing, but I think it's just undeserved reputation, you can't even handle a few small snakes. I am sorry, we have to help the world get rid of a great evil today."

Ding ChunQiu smiled and said: "Old man is careless, I fell into the trap of these cold-blooded reptiles, I will die today, it's really fate....."

But he did not finish talking as one of his disciples who is trapped by the python suddenly shouted: "Heroes of Beggar Clan, please release me, you will have great benefit. My master is proficient in trickery, you can never guard against him. Just a minor slip-up and you will fall into his trap." Quan GuanQing said coldly: "And how do we benefit by releasing you?" The person replied: "There are three treasures in my XingXiu Sect, they are called XingXiu Three Treasures. Only the Old Freak of XingXiu and I knows its hidden location. If you release me, I will help you kill the Old Freak of XingXiu and offer you the treasures. If you kill me, you will never find the treasures."

Another XingXiu disciple cried out: "Great hero, great hero, don't be fooled by him! One of the three treasures was already stolen. It's better for you to release me. I am the loyal one, I will never lie to you."

In an instant, numerous XingXiu disciples clamored: "Heroes of Beggar Clan, it's best if you spare me, neither of them are loyal, I will serve you wholeheartedly."

"Great hero, I know most of the martial arts of XingXiu Sect, I will tell you everything, I won't hide them from you."

"There's a great conspiracy surrounding our arrival in Central Plains, the main purpose is to deal with Beggar Clan. Great heroes, do you want to know all the inside information?"

"Our XingXiu Sea hides unlimited gold, silvers and rare treasure, I know the hiding spot of every treasure. I will lead all of you there and dig it out, heroes of Beggar Clan you no longer need to beg for food anymore."

These people kept boot-licking and tried to pledge their loyalty, some tried to offer treasures, some tried to stir up curiosity by revealing secret plans, some of their words were outright lies and completely absurd. Some XingXiu disciples

were on the verge of death due to being poisoned and constricted by the snakes, they struggled for air to beg for forgiveness.

Members of Beggar Clan did not expect that the disciples of XingXiu were so spineless, thus they despised them, but their sense of curiosity was aroused and they moved closer to listen attentively. Quan GuanQing said coldly: "You are not loyal to even your own master, how can you pledge loyalty to total strangers? Aren't you ridiculous?"

A XingXiu disciple replied: "No it's different, very different. The Old Freak of XingXiu has lousy skills, what's the future prospect in following him? What's the benefit in following him? How can the Old Freak of XingXiu be a match for Beggar Clan?"

"Yea, Beggar Clan taking in disciples of XingXiu Sect, Western and Central Plains will be in shock, who dare not admire the heroes of Beggar Clan?"

"The word 'Hero' is not sufficient to describe you, we have to refer you as 'Chivalrous Hero', 'Saint', 'Savior of commoner'!"

"I am articulate and good with words, I will travel to the four corners of the earth and spread the words about your great kindness, the chivalrous heroes of Beggar Clan will be renowned throughout the entire world."

"Pei, the chivalrous heroes of Beggar Clan is already famous throughout the world, why do they even need you to advertise? I thought of the title of 'Saint' and 'Savior of commoner' for them. They bestow intelligence upon me."

A five-pouch Beggar Clan disciple frowned and said: "You lot of scumbags, making so much racket, listening to you lot made us fed up. Old Freak of XingXiu, you are really good for nothing, why did you accept these shameless people as disciples? I'll send you to heaven first, and then I let these lot of scumbags follow you, I am going to slaughter you whole lot today!" As he finished, he gave a shout and send his palm towards Ding ChunQiu.

This palm strike was accompanied by rapid wind, the strength behind it extremely strong and fierce, it landed on Ding ChunQiu's chest. But Ding ChunQiu was completely unharmed, the beggar felt his knees softened and he collapsed onto the ground, he curled up and started twitching, after a while he was motionless. The crowd of Beggar Clan members were surprised, they shouted: "What happen?", two beggars came out to help him up. When the two men touched his body, they started shaking and also collapsed after a while. Three nearby beggar clan disciples naturally stretched out their hands to support them, but when they touched the two men, they also collapsed. The rest of the crowd was stunned, they no longer dared to touch their fallen comrades.

Quan GuanQing shouted: "There's poison on this old man's body, we can't touch his body, release the projectiles!"

Eighty nine four to five pouch disciples pulled out their hidden weapons, steel darts, flying knives, sleeve arrows, cobblestones, they threw all these weapons at Ding ChunQiu. Ding ChunQiu gave a loud shout and turned his head sharply, he swung his white hair out, his hairs were like soft whiskers and repelled ten of the projectiles thrown at him. But there was multiple "Ah Yo" cries, six to seven beggars were struck by hidden projectiles. These projectiles did not hit their vital spots, some were grazed on their flesh, but these men immediately collapsed and died.

Quan GuanQing shouted: "Move back, move back!" Suddenly there was a swishing sound, it was caused by the shooting of a steel dart, Ding ChunQiu used his hairs to grip the dart and shoot it towards him. Quan GuanQing hastily use his iron flute to deflect it, there was a ringing sound and the dart was repelled far away. He thought this Old Freak of XingXiu was really powerful, he can only rely on his giant python to kill him, he brought his flute to his mouth, as he was about to blow when his lips suddenly felt numb and he

instantly became dizzy, he knew something was wrong and hastily threw away the iron flute, there was a thud sound and he collapsed. The Clan members was shocked, immediately two men moved forward to help him up. Quan GuanQing said drowsily: "I ... I am poisoned, Every ... everyone...quick...quickly...leave." The Clan members were scared out of their wits, they carried him and fled, abandoning all the bodies, snakes and cloth bags.

You TanZhi was still squatting in the bushes, he's so shocked by the ongoing that he dared not move an inch. The surrounding was a total silence, a dozen poisoned Clan members curled into a ball like porcupine, apparently they had already died.

The remaining giant pythons were no long under the control of Quan GuanQing's flute sound, they will not harm anyone and only immobilized Ding ChunQiu and his disciples. No one in the XingXiu Sect dared to move or struggle for fear of provoking the vicious nature of the snakes and getting bitten.

The silence remained for a while, finally someone spoke: "Master, your divine skill is unrivalled throughout the world, you easily slaughtered all these evil and vicious beggars and drive them all away ..."

Before he could finish another disciple interrupted him and said: "Master, don't listen to his bullshit, he's the one that praised the beggars as 'Chivalrous Heroes' and 'Saints'".

Another disciple said: "We followed Master for so many years, how can we not know his ability to split the heaven and earth? We talk nonsense and fooled the beggars just now to distract them so that Master can display his unparalleled skills."

Suddenly someone burst into tears and wailed: "Master, Master! Disciple deserves to die, disciple is confused, I was afraid of death and surrendered to the enemy, I sincerely



regret it now and I am willing to die with the poisonous snakes, I dare not ask Master for mercy anymore.”

The rest of the disciples immediately came to an understanding: Their Master hated people who explain away and whitewash their mistakes, only by condemning themselves and admitting to all sorts of mistakes can they hope to receive their Master’s mercy and forgiveness. In an instant, all the disciples start cursing themselves, they cursed their own evil intentions and how they deserve to die. You TanZhi eavesdropped from the bushes, he was utterly baffled by them.

Ding ChunQiu gathered his internal energy, he thought of bursting through the three giant pythons binding him by using pure force. Unfortunately, the python’s body was elastic and flexible. When Ding ChunQiu exerted his strength, the snakes only lengthened, their bodies did not break. Ding ChunQiu was covered with poison, his hair and clothes all contained deadly toxin. When the beggars attacked him with their weapons, all of them came into contact with his poison, however the python’s skin was thick, tough and slippery, his poison could not penetrate it. As he listened to his disciples endlessly talking, he raged: “If someone can come up with an idea to drive away the snakes, I will spare him. You lot still don’t understand my temper? I will never kill people who are useful to me. You people only know how to talk nonsense and crap, what use is it?”

As he said this, the group of disciples immediately quietened down. After a while, someone said: “We need someone to use a torch and burn the bodies of these snakes, they will definitely run off.” Ding ChunQiu scolded him: “You are farting! We are out here in the wilderness, there’s no village or shop nearby, who will come by? Even if someone did come by, once they see so many snakes, they will get scared and run off, why would they even bother to bring a torch and burn them?” The rest of the disciples kept

suggesting ideas, but all the ideas were lousy and limited, everyone just kept on talking. They hoped to curry favor with their master and show that they follow his orders and make themselves useful by suggesting ideas.

After a long time, a disciple was bound so tightly that he could not breathe anymore, in his dizzy state he randomly bit the snake. The python felt pain and retaliated by biting his throat, that disciple gave a tragic cry and died.

Ding ChunQiu was getting more and more anxious. If he was surrounded by numerous enemies, he could employ devious tricks and schemes, but these snakes were completely immune to tricks and schemes, he feared the snakes might get hungry and eventually swallow him.

His fear was indeed accurate, after not being influenced by the flute sound for a long time a giant python was extremely hungry, it opened its mouth and bit a XingXiu disciple. The disciples cried out: "Master save me, Master save me!" His two legs had already been swallowed by the snake. His body was also swallowed, his waist entered first and it slowly move to his chest, as he's still not yet dead he cried out loudly, his cry shook the wilderness.

Everyone knew the same thing was about to happen to them, the sight frightened them greatly. One disciple saw the Old Freak of XingXiu was also at his wits end, his resentment rose and he openly derided him, he blamed Ding ChunQiu for implicating him, he was originally a shepherd at XingXiu Sea but was threatened and coerced into joining XingXiu Sect, since he's about to die, he poured out all his resentment and dissatisfaction against Ding ChunQiu.

As he began cursing, the rest of the disciples also joined in. All the disciples suffered regular ill-treatment under Ding ChunQiu, they held the grudge in their heart and dared not voice it out. Since everyone was about to die together, they started to scold him to vent their frustrations. One disciple was cursing loudly and his body stirred, this provoked the

python and it retaliated by biting him on the shoulder, the man screamed: "Ah Yo, Ah Yo! Save me, save me!"

You TanZhi saw these people were completely immobilized by the python, his heart did not have anymore misgivings and he stood up, the place was not suitable for staying and he wanted to leave quickly.

The XingXiu disciples suddenly saw his iron mask, they had a shock, but someone remembered that he can help save them, he exclaimed: "Great hero, chivalrous man, please gather some dried leaves and light a fire to drive away these snakes, I immediately give you ... give you one thousand taels of silver." Another person said: "One thousand taels are insufficient, we have to give ten thousand taels" and another person said: "This gentleman is a chivalrous person, his conscience is the best, he will definitely carry out righteous act, moreover there's nothing dangerous about lighting a fire to burn the snakes." In an instant their praises got louder and louder, the previous rewards quickly increased to one million taels of gold.

The cursing ability of these disciples was first class, their flattering and bootlicking ability was even better and well honed. You TanZhi has never heard anyone call him "Hero", "Chivalrous", "Benevolent and Righteous", "Peerless Hero". Under their praise, his body felt light, as if he was floating, he suddenly felt he possesses the spirit of "Great Hero" and "Chivalrous Person", he did not care for the gold, he only felt regret that AhZi did not hear these people immortalize him.

At once he set off and started picking up dried leaves, but he saw there were many fierce pythons, he was scared of accidentally provoking these snakes and getting trapped by them, after thinking for a while, he gathered dried twigs and made a huge fire in front of him, he picked up one burning twig and threw it at the nearest python. He hid behind the fire, his body poised, if the snake rush towards him, he will immediately run and escape, whatever "Great Hero" or "Chivalrous Person", he didn't care about it anymore.

The python was indeed afraid of fire, once it saw the fire burning, it released the XingXiu people and slithered into the bushes. You TanZhi saw his initial attempt was successful, along with the cheering of the XingXiu disciples, he lit several more twigs and threw them at the pythons. All the snakes started to flee, even the giant pythons can't withstand the fire, it released its captives and slithered away. Moments later, hundreds of snakes and giant pythons all fled the scene, not a single one remained.

The XingXiu disciples celebrated and cheered loudly: "Master is extremely wise. Master has great foresight, the fire method is indeed the most effective."

"Master has great fortune, he turned ill luck into good!"

"It's all due to Master's graceful manner, he directed with perfect ease. He saved our insignificant lives!"

They kept praising and piling credits on Ding ChunQiu, they did not mention about You TanZhi's effort in freeing them.

You TanZhi stood rooted to the ground, he felt strange, he pondered: "Just a few moments ago you people cursed your Master, but now you praised him to the heavens, and now you completely forgotten about me, what happened to the 'Great Hero' and 'Chivalrous Person'?"

Ding ChunQiu waved his hand to beckon him over and said: "Iron-head guy, come over here, what's your name?" You TanZhi was used to being humiliated, even though Ding ChunQiu was rude he did not care and replied: "My name is You TanZhi." And he walked a few steps towards him. Ding ChunQiu said: "Are those beggars dead? Go check to see if they are still breathing."

You TanZhi said: "Ok" and he bend over his body and stretched out his hand to check the breath of a beggar, he didn't feel any breath, the person was long dead. He tried another beggar, his breath also stopped long ago, he said: "All of them are dead, they are not breathing." He saw the expressions of the XingXiu disciples were strange, they

seemed to be gloating at his misfortune. He did not understand the reason behind it, he repeated his words: "All of them are dead, they are not breathing." After a while the smug look on their faces slowly died off, replaced by expression of shock and disbelief.

Ding ChunQiu said: "Go examine every single beggar, see if any one of them can be saved." You TanZhi said: "Ok" and he examined all the beggars, he shook his head and said: "All of them are dead. Elder's skill is indeed formidable." Ding ChunQiu smiled sarcastically and said: "Your poison-resisting skill is also formidable." You TanZhi felt curious and said: "My...what...poison resisting skill?"

He was very puzzled, he did not understand the meaning of Ding ChunQiu's word. He did not realize that when he checked the beggar for breath, it was the same as going to the gates of hell. When Ding ChunQiu was immobilized by the python, he could not escape and had to be rescued by You TanZhi, if news of this spread out he will definitely lose face, thus when the snakes left he immediately thought of silencing You TanZhi. Unexpectedly, for the past few months, You TanZhi kept on practicing the [Tendon-Changing Sutra], the poison of the frost silkworm had also merged flawlessly within his body thus the poison on the beggars could not harm him at all.

Ding ChunQiu pondered: "Looking at his skin and listening to his voice, he's extremely young, he definitely won't have any real skill or ability, most probably he's carrying anti-poison pearl or some other treasures that repel poison, or he had previously consumed some miracle antidote." He said: "Brother You, come over here, I have something to say."

You TanZhi saw his speech was sincere, but he personally witnessed how he viciously killed all the beggars, his disciples also cursed and flattered randomly, he felt these people were extremely difficult to deal with and its best to stay far away from them, he said: "Junior has something to

do, I can't stay, I have to go now." He cupped his fists and walked away.

He only walked a few steps, a light breeze swept past his body, both his wrist was caught by someone. You TanZhi raised his head, he saw the person was a large man from the XingXiu Sect. He did not know his intention, but saw him laughed grimly, he knew he was in trouble and cried: "Let me go!" and he gave a tug.

There was a whooshing sound over his head, a large body flew over his head, with a loud bang the body slammed onto the opposite cliff, the skull was crushed immediately, the brain and skull mixed into a slurry.

You TanZhi saw the person slammed the cliff with an extremely violent force, he found it hard to believe, he was even more astounded that the person was the one holding his wrist moments ago, he was puzzled: "This man is perfectly fine, why did he bang his head on the cliff and commit suicide? Is he mad?" He never suspected that when he gave a tug, his fierce strength threw the large man out onto the cliff.

The group of XingXiu disciple gave an "Ah" sound, their faces changed color.

Ding ChunQiu saw the way You TanZhi threw his disciple, it was flimsy, not first-class skill, but the physical strength was highly unusual, he thought You TanZhi must be gifted with innate superhuman strength, but his martial arts was mediocre, his body flashed and he extended his hand to push down on You TanZhi's head. You TanZhi was caught off guard, he was forced to kneel on the ground, he tried to straighten his body to stand up but he felt as if a ten thousand pound stone mountain was sitting on his head, he could not move at all, he pleaded: "Elder please spare my life."

Ding ChunQiu heard him plead for mercy, he felt assured and ask: "Who is your teacher? You are really bold, how dare

you kill my disciple?" You TanZhi said: " I ..... I have no master, I dare not kill Elder's disciple."

Ding ChunQiu did not want to waste time talking to him, it will be easier to simply kill him, he released his hand to let You TanZhi stand up, immediately he waved his palm and strike towards You TanZhi's chest. You TanZhi had a huge shock and he hastily extended his right hand to deflect the palm. Ding ChunQiu's palm was slow, You TanZhi extended his right hand and both their palms met. Ding ChunQiu wanted their palms to meet, he gathered his internal energy and sent it out together with the poison in his hand, this was his famous [Great Energy Dissolving Skill], the victim will either contract deadly poison, or sustain damage to his meridians and become incapable of exerting internal energy, the victim will feel as if all his internal energy was dissolved, the outcome was completely controlled by Ding ChunQiu. Ding ChunQiu killed countless people with this skill. When martial artists hear the word [Great Energy Dissolving Skill], they will feel great loathing and fear.

Both their palms clashed, You TanZhi's body shook and he retreated six to seven steps, he tried to stand his ground but was forced to sit down, but the opponent's force did not dissipate, his arm hit the ground and his back also followed, his head also hit the ground and he somersaulted three times, he finally managed to stabilize himself and he kowtowed and said: "Elder please spare my life."

When Ding ChunQiu clashed palms with him, he felt You TanZhi's internal energy was extremely strong, the energy possessed a strange coldness which also contained deadly poison, although You TanZhi fell down pathetically, but the poison palm from Ding ChunQiu can't harm his opponent's meridians, he can't stop him from exerting internal energy, in terms of internal energy and poison, You TanZhi was not at a disadvantage, why the need to beg for mercy? Could it be that he deliberately ridiculed him? He walked a few steps

towards You TanZhi and asked: "You are asking me to spare your life, is it the truth or your faking it?"

You TanZhi kowtowed and said: "Junior is sincere, I beg Elder to spare my life."

Ding ChunQiu pondered: "I don't know what strange encounter this man met, he accumulated more poison than me, he's a rare treasure. I need to recruit this man to find out how he practiced his skills, and then absorb all the poison from his body, and then kill him. Won't it be a waste if I just kill him like this?" He pressed his palm on You TanZhi's iron head, channeled his internal energy and said: "Unless you accept me as your Master, else why should I spare your life?"

You TanZhi felt as if his head was being roasted, his face felt extremely hot, he was very scared. After being tortured by AhZi, he had long resigned himself to adversity, whatever good or evil, unyielding integrity, he has forgotten all about them, he only hope to preserve his life, he quickly said: "Master, You TanZhi is willing to be your disciple, I beg Master to accept me."

Ding ChunQiu was overjoyed and said: "You want me to be your Master, why not. But our Sect has many rules and regulation, can you abide to all of them? Do you wholeheartedly accept my orders and never dare to defy?" You TanZhi said: "Disciple is willing to abide by the rules and follow Master." Ding ChunQiu said: "If I want to take your life, you are willing to give it up?" You TanZhi said: "This ... this ..." Ding ChunQiu said: "Think through it properly, if you are willing just say you are willing, if you are not willing just say so."

You TanZhi pondered: "You want to take my life, of course I am not willing. If it really reach such a state, then I will simply escape, if I fail to escape then even if I am not willing there's nothing I can do about it." He replied: "Disciple is willing to die for Master." Ding ChunQiu laughed and said: "Very good, very good. Tell me all about your life experiences."



You TanZhi did not wish to talk about his life experiences or recent misfortune, he said he's a farm boy, he was captured by the Liao during their raid and they put an iron mask on his head. Ding ChunQiu inquired about the strange poison in his body, You TanZhi only revealed how he met the frost silkworm and Monk Huijing, how he stole the frost silkworm, he lied that he was accidentally bitten by the silkworm, thus his body was frozen solid and the silkworm just died, he did not mention about AhZi or how she use him to train her poison palm. Ding ChunQiu pressed for more details about the appearance and shape of the frost silkworm, his face revealed envy and admiration. You TanZhi pondered: "If I talk about the book with strange drawings, he will definitely snatch it and not return it." Ding ChunQiu asked him about his strange martial arts but he did not reveal the truth.

Ding ChunQiu did not know about the martial arts of the [Tendon-Changing Sutra], he saw You TanZhi's martial art was only mediocre, but his Yin-Frost internal energy was purely due to the miraculous effect of the frost silkworm, he cursed in his heart: "This divine silkworm, to think it was absorbed by some strange coincidence, it's really a pity." After thinking for a while, he asked: "The monk who captured this frost silkworm, he's from MinZhong Temple in Nanjing?" You TanZhi said: "Yes."

Ding ChunQiu said: "This Huijing monk said the frost silkworm originated from the summit of KunLun Mountains. Very good, since one frost silkworm came from there, there must be two or three more. But KunLun Mountain's radius is a few thousand li, without an experience guide to point the way it would be difficult to catch the frost silkworm." He personally experienced the divine effect of the frost silkworm, he felt it was even more valuable than the [Divine Wooden King Tripod], the prime task was to first capture Monk Huijing and ask him to lead the way to KunLun Mountain to capture the frost silkworm. Monk Huijing was

from Shaolin, originally it's a messy affair to mess with him but luckily he's currently based in Nanjing and this makes it easier to capture him. At once he ordered You TanZhi to perform the rites and formally took him in as his disciple.

The rest of the disciples saw their Master was especially attentive towards You TanZhi, naturally they heaped tons of praises and tried to get into his good books. These bunch of disciples had openly cursed their Master and surrendered to the enemy, Ding ChunQiu still has uses for them and thus he pretended to forget about their betrayal, moreover he had foreseen their betrayal and he was not too angry about it.

The group travelled north-east. You TanZhi followed behind Ding ChunQiu, he saw his sleeves fluttering in the wind his footsteps light, he looked like a god, he felt his admiration rising: "I have such an incredible Master, it's really due to the good fortune accumulated by my previous life."

They travelled for three days, on this afternoon, the group rested and quenched their thirst at a pavilion, suddenly they heard the sound of horses, four people came riding on horses.

The four of them rode their horses near the pavilion, the person on the lead horse shouted: "Elder brother, second brother, there's water in the pavilion, let's drink a few bowls and let the horses regain their stamina." He dismounted from the horse and walked into the pavilion, the other three also dismounted. The four of them saw Ding ChunQiu and his group of disciples, they nodded their heads to show courtesy and walked to the vat of water, they used the clay bowl and scooped the water.

You TanZhi saw the first person was dressed in black, his figure thin and small, he has a moustache and he looked agile and brave. The second person was dressed in yellow robe, his figure was thin but his stature tall, both his eyebrows slanted downwards, he looked sickly and has a vicious expression. The third person was dressed in red robe,

his figure tall and sturdy, his ears big, he has a thick white beard, he looked like a rich merchant. The last person was dressed in green scholar robe, he looked around fifty years of age, his eyes were narrow perhaps due to studying too much, he did not scoop the water but drank from his own wine gourd.

At this moment, a monk came walking with big strides on the road, he stopped outside the pavilion, joined both his hands together and respectfully said: "Benefactors, junior monk is thirsty, I wish to rest in the pavilion and drink a bowl of water." The black-robed person smiled and said: "Master don't need to be so courteous, we are all passers-by, this pavilion is not built by us, come in and drink some water." The monk replied: "Amitufo, thank you very much." He entered the pavilion.

The monk was around twenty five years of age with dense eyebrows, big eyes and a big sinking flat nose. His appearance was rather ugly, his monk robe had numerous cloth patches and was extremely clean. He waited for the three men to finish drinking before approaching the water vat, he scooped a bowl of water, pressed both his hands together and lowered his head, he respectfully said: "When Buddha gaze upon a bowl of water, he sees eighty four thousand bugs, if I don't chant this mantra I will be breaking my oath of abstinence from meat" and so he chanted the mantra: "Yan Fu Xi Bo Luo Mo Ni Sha He", after he finished chanting he drank the water.

The black-robed man felt curious when he saw it, he asked: "Little master, why are you chanting?" The monk said: "Junior monk is chanting the mantra for drinking water. When Buddha gaze upon a bowl of water, he sees eighty four thousand bugs, monks are forbidden to kill, thus I have to chant this mantra before drinking the water." The black-robed man laughed and said: "Little master you really like to joke, this water is very clean, there's no bug", the monk replied: "Benefactor you don't understand. With our mortal

eyes, you can't see any bugs in the water, but with the divine eye of Buddha, he can see thousands of bugs in the water." The black-robed man laughed: "After chanting the mantra, you drink all the eighty four thousand bugs into your stomach, the bugs won't die anymore?" The monk hesitated and said: "This....this...my master didn't teach me. Most probably they won't die."

The yellow-robed man interrupted and said: "Not true, not true! The bug still has to die, but when little master chanted the mantra, the eighty four thousand bugs will all go to heaven, little master drink a bowl of water and help eighty four thousand souls find peace. Great achievement, great achievement!"

The monk did not know whether his words were true or false, both his hands held onto the bowl of water, he stared blankly and muttered: "Drink a bowl of water and help eighty four thousand souls find peace? I don't have such great powers."

The yellow-robed man stood beside the monk and took the bowl from his hand, he inspected the bowl and counted: "One, two, three, four, five, six, .....one thousand, two thousand, ten thousand, twenty thousand ... Not true, not true! Little master, the bowl has eighty three thousand nine hundred ninety nine bugs, you counted one extra."

The monk said: "Namo Amitufo. Benefactor you must be joking, you are a mortal how can you possess the divine eye?" The yellow-robed man said: "So you have divine eyes?" The monk said: "I don't have it." The yellow-robed man replied: "Not true, not true! I think you have divine eyes, or else how would you know I am a mortal and not Bodhisattva?" The monk looked at him to the left and right, his expression utterly perplexed.

The big red-robed man walked over, took the clay bowl and returned it to the monk, laughing: "Master please drink the water! This brother of mine is only pulling your leg, don't take it seriously." The monk accepted the bowl and said

respectfully: "Many thanks, many thanks." But his heart felt uncertain and he did not drink the water. The big man said: "I saw little master footstep is sturdy, you possess martial arts, how should I address you, where did you become a monk?"

The monk put the bowl on top of the cover of the water vat, he bowed and said: "Junior monk is Xu Zhu, I am from Shaolin Temple."

The black-robed man shouted: "Terrific, terrific! So you turn out to be an expert from Shaolin, come, come, come! You and I will spar!" Xu Zhu waved his hand repeatedly and said: "Junior monk's martial arts is lowly, how would I dare to fight with sir?" The black robed-man said: "I didn't get into fights for many days, my hands are itchy, we are only sparring, it's not a real fight, why are you so scared?" Xu Zhu retreated two steps and said: "Although junior monk practiced martial arts for a few years, but it's purely for strengthening my body, I really can't fight." The black-robed man said: "All the monks from Shaolin are experts in martial artists. Monks who just started learning martial arts are forbidden to leave the temple. Since little master is able to leave the temple, then you must be a top expert. Come, come! We will only spar for one hundred moves, it doesn't matter who win or lose."

Xu Zhu retreated another two steps and said: "Benefactor you don't understand, junior monk is able to leave the temple not because of my martial arts, but because the temple currently lacks people to deliver letters. Junior monk is force to help out in delivering the letters. Junior monk is to deliver ten 'Heroes Invitation Card', my master ordered me to return immediately once they have been delivered, I am forbidden to fight, I had delivered four of the cards, I still have six cards with me. Benefactor your martial art is superb, please accept this invitation card." He retrieved an oilcloth bag from within his bosom, he opened the bag and took out a big red card, he respectfully presented it and

said: "May I ask for your name so that I can account for it when I report back to my master."

The black-robed man did not take the card, he said: "You did not fight with me, how do you know I am a hero or coward? Let's spar for a few moves, I will accept this card after I beat you." He took two steps forward, his left fist made a false move, his right fist swung towards Xu Zhu. As his fist was about to reach Xu Zhu, he immediately held it back and shouted: "Quick retaliate!"

The burly red-robed man heard Xu Zhu mentioned about 'Heroes Invitation Card', his interest was piqued and he said: "Fourth Younger Brother, there's no hurry to compete, let's take a look at what is on the invitation card." He took the card from Xu Zhu and saw the words written: "Shaolin Temple's Abbot XuanCi, respectfully invites heroes from all over the world to gather on the ninth day of the ninth lunar month, the Chongyang Festival, at Songshan Shaolin Temple to challenge the reputation of Gusu Murong's 'Returning you with your own move'."

The burly man gave an "Ah" cry, he gave the card to the scholar beside him and said to Xu Zhu: "So Shaolin is holding this 'Heroes Meet' to challenge Gusu Murong family....." The black robed man shouted: "Excellent, excellent, I am called 'Gust of Wind' Feng BoE, I am the subordinate of Gusu Murong family. You don't need any 'Heroes Meet', I will personally ask for advice from Shaolin expert now."

Xu Zhu retreated another two steps, his left foot was outside the pavilion, he said: "So you are Benefactor Feng. My master told me, Shaolin Temple is requesting Mr. Murong's esteem presence at the temple, but we dare not offend him. It's only that rumors have been spreading around and many people have died in recent years under Gusu Murong's divine skill in 'Returning you with your own move'. My martial grandfather Master XuanBei died in Dali, we don't know if it's related to the Murong family, except for

our abbot, everyone had suspicion in their hearts, thus he....”

The black-robed man interrupted and said: “This matter is not related to our Gusu Murong family, but you will most probably not believe me even if I tell you. Since we can’t fully explain the ongoing of this matter, we will settle through martial arts. Let’s do it this way, both of us will spar right now, it’s like drumming up support and setting the stage for the main show. On Chongyang Festival, I will then visit Shaolin Temple and fight every single challenger, joyful, joyful! But after going through seventeen to eighteen challengers I will most probably be heavily injured and immobile and won’t have the chance to fight with your Abbot XuanCi, sigh I don’t have the fate, pity, pity!” As he finished he rubbed his fists to get ready for the fight.

The burly man said: “Fourth Younger Brother, hold on, we will clarify first, it’s not too late to fight afterwards.”

The yellow-robed man said: “Not true, not true. If we clarify the matter then there’s no need to fight. Fourth Younger Brother, this is a good opportunity, if you want to fight you cannot clarify the matter.”

The tall and sturdy man ignored both his brothers and said to Xu Zhu: “I am Deng BaiChuan, the person over there is my second younger brother GongYe Gan.” As he finished he pointed at the scholar, then he pointed at the yellow-robed man and said: “This is my third younger brother Bao BuTong, we are all followers of Young Master Murong.”

Xu Zhu paid tribute to all four men, he said: “Benefactor Deng, Benefactor Gong...” Bao BuTong interrupted: “Not true, not true. My second brother’s surname is GongYe, you call him Benefactor Gong, that is wrong.” Xu Zhu quickly said: “Pardon me, pardon me! Junior monk is poorly educated, Benefactor GongYe please don’t be offended. Benefactor Bao...” Bao BuTong interrupted again: “Wrong again. Although my surname is Bao, but I have never given alms to monks or nuns in my entire life, thus you cannot

address me as Benefactor.” Xu Zhu said: “Yes, yes. Third Senior Bao, Fourth Master Feng.” Bao BuTong said: “Wrong again. My younger brother Feng will fight with you later, no matter who wins or loses, you will gain some experience, your martial arts will definitely have some progress, isn’t he making a donation to you?” Xu Zhu said: “Yes, yes. Benefactor Feng, junior monk really cannot fight. Monks should focus primarily on cultivating inner self, martial art is secondary, it doesn’t matter if my martial art is lousy.”

Feng BoE sighed: “You don’t take martial arts seriously, your skill is most likely ordinary, there’s no need to fight anymore.” As he finished, he shook his head repeatedly, his enthusiasm dulled. Xu Zhu breathed a sigh of relief, his expression joyful and said: “Yes, yes.”

Deng BaiChuan said: “Master Xu Zhu, this invitation card, I will accept it on behalf of my young master. My young master should have visited your temple a few months ago, could it be that he never came?”

Xu Zhu replied: “He didn’t visit. The abbot long for his arrival but he didn’t come, twice we sent our people to visit your residence, but we only heard that Senior Elder Murong had died and your young master had left the residence. This time, the abbot requested the Head-Monk of DaMo Hall to visit your residence in SuZhou to deliver the invitation card, he’s afraid that your young master is still not at home and he could only try to widely circulate the invitation card within the martial arts fraternity, I hope you can explain this indiscretion to your young master. When Benefactor Murong visits our temple next year, our abbot will personally offer his apology.”

Deng BaiChuan said: “Little master don’t need to be so polite. The appointed date is still a long time away, my young master will definitely visit ShaoLin Temple at the appointed date and pay his respects to the abbot.” Xu Zhu joined his hands together and bowed, he said: “Our abbot



greatly welcomes Young Master Murong and all of you to visit ShaoLin Temple.”

Feng BoE saw Xu Zhu was outdated and overly formal, he didn't have the least bit of passionate straightforward behavior of martial artists, although he may be a monk, but he doesn't look like a world renowned “Shaolin Monk”, he could not tolerate him and ignored him, he turned and look at Ding ChunQiu and his group of disciples. The XingXiu disciples all carried weapons, obviously they are martial artists, Feng BoE should be able to select a few and fight with them.

When You TanZhi saw Feng BoE and the rest entered the pavilion, he immediately hid behind his master. Ding ChunQiu was tall and large and was able to hide him, Deng BaiChuan and the rest did not see his weird iron head. Feng BoE saw Ding ChunQiu was healthy in old age, he had an immortal aura about him and looked like a top master, Feng BoE felt his admiration rising, but he still stepped ahead and challenged: “May I know the name of this elder?” Ding ChunQiu smiled and said: “My surname is Ding”

At this moment, Xu Zhu suddenly gave an “Ah” sound, he shouted: “Martial grandfather, you are here!” Feng BoE turned his head, he saw seven to eight monks travelling on the road, leading the group were two elder monks, two monks at the rear carried a stretcher and someone was lying on it. Xu Zhu quickly stepped out of the pavilion and paid his respects to the two elder monks, he also reported about Deng BaiChuan and his group.

The monk on the right nodded his head, he entered the pavilion and said to Deng BaiChuan: “Old monk is XuanNan” He pointed to another elder monk and said: “This is my junior martial brother XuanTong, it's fortunate that we get to meet four great virtuous people from Gusu Murong family.”

Deng BaiChuan and the rest has long heard of XuanNan's reputation, his face was full of wrinkles, his gaze deep and clear, they quickly paid their respect. Feng BoE said: “Great

Master is Head-Monk of Shaolin Damo-Hall, I have long heard of your divine skills, I wish to ask for some advice.”

XuanNan gave a slight smile and said: “Old monk and junior XuanTong receive the orders of our abbot to travel to JianNan’s Basin of Swallows, the residence of Murong family, to deliver the invitation card, this is the third time our temple has send someone to the Basin of Swallows. But, unexpectedly, we met here by chance, our fate is really deep.” As he finished he took out a red invitation card from his bosom.

Deng BaiChuan accepted the card with both hands, he saw the words on the card: “Respectfully inviting Benefactor Murong from Gusu Basin of Swallows”, he knew the contents must be similar to the card delivered by Xu Zhu, he said: “Both of you are eminent monks of Shaolin Temple, you enjoy great reputation in the martial arts fraternity, it’s a great honor for our Murong family to have you personally deliver the card. We have already gotten the invitation card from that little master, we should have responded quickly. On Chongyang Festival, my young master Murong will definitely pay his respects at Shaolin Temple, he will personally express his thanks to all eminent monks of Shaolin and clarify all misunderstandings.”

XuanNan pondered: “You said to clarify all misunderstandings, could it be that senior martial brother XuanBei was not killed by your Murong family?” Suddenly he heard someone shouted behind him: “Ah, Master, it’s him!” XuanNan turned his head, he saw a weird looking man pointing his finger at the stretcher, the man whispered something to the white-haired old man.

You TanZhi whispered to Ding ChunQiu: “The fat monk on the stretcher, he is the one who captured the frost silkworm, but I don’t know how he ended up being stretchered away by Shaolin.”

Ding ChunQiu heard this fat monk was the original owner of the frost silkworm, he was overjoyed and whispered: “You

didn't mistake him for someone else?" You TanZhi said: "No, he's called Huijing. Master look, his body is fat and his belly round." Ding ChunQiu saw Huijing's belly was even larger than a pregnant woman, with such a large belly, no one will ever forget it once they see it, they won't mistake him for someone else, Ding ChunQiu said to XuanNan: "Great Master, I am a friend of this monk Huijing, is he sick?"

XuanNan pressed both his hands together and said: "May I ask the name of Benefactor, how did you know my martial nephew?"

Ding ChunQiu pondered: "This Huijing is with a group of Shaolin monks, this is very troublesome. Luckily we met him here, we can kidnap or seize him, much easier than trying to infiltrate Shaolin to capture him." As he thought about the miraculous effect of the frost silkworm, his chest felt hot, he said: "I am Ding ChunQiu."

As he said the word "Ding ChunQiu", XuanNan, XuanTong, Deng BaiChuan, GongYe Gan, Bao BuTong, Feng BoE, all six of them simultaneously gave an "Ah" sound, their expression became grave. The evil reputation of the Old Freak of XingXiu was renowned throughout the world, they did not expect him to be a person with such graceful manner and elegance, even more unexpected was to be able to meet him at this pavilion. The six of them immediately became alert to guard against him.

XuanNan calmed down in an instant, he said: "So it's Mr. Ding from XingXiu Sea, I have long heard of your name, it's really well known." He did not say "it's fortunate to meet you" or other pleasantries, XuanNan thought: "Whoever meets you, it's really their great misfortune."

Ding ChunQiu said: "I don't dare, Head-Monk of Shaolin Damo-Hall 'Shifting Heaven and Earth within the Sleeves', renowned all over the world, truly well known and respected. This monk Huijing, I am looking all over for him, to think we can meet here, excellent, excellent!"

XuanNan's eyebrows slightly narrowed, he said: "It's unfortunate, martial nephew Huijing did not obey the teachings of Shaolin Temple, he broke excessive rules. A year ago, he left the temple without permission and committed numerous evils. The abbot dispatched several people to look for him, after much effort they finally found him and now we are bringing him back to the temple. Mr. Ding, you have met him before?" Ding ChunQiu said: "So he's not sick, he was injured by you people, is his injuries serious?" XuanNan did not reply immediately, after a while he said: "He refused to accept the orders of the abbot, he even injured others." XuanNan pondered: "If he associated with evil demons like you, he broke another great commandment."

Ding ChunQiu said: "I was at Kunlun Mountain, I spent a lot of effort before capturing a frost silkworm, it's an extremely important object, but it got stolen by monk Huijing. I travelled from XingXiu Sea to Central Plains just to retrieve the frost silkworm....."

He did not finish his words as Huijing shouted: "Where is my frost silkworm? You have seen my frost silkworm? I found the silkworm after much painstaking effort at Kunlun Mountain....you...you...you stole it?"

Ever since You TanZhi revealed himself by shouting out, Feng BoE kept looking and examining his iron mask, he did not bother about the conversation between XuanNan, Ding ChunQiu and Huijing. He walked a few rounds around You TanZhi, he saw the iron mask was very well made, it cannot be removed from his head, he wanted to stretch out his hands to knock on the mask, after examining a while he said: "Hello friend, how are you!"

You TanZhi replied: "I....I am fine!" He saw Feng BoE was very energetic, jumping and moving around, he was scared. Feng BoE said: "Friend, this iron mask, how did you put it on? I have travelled all over the world but I have never seen such face mask before." You TanZhi felt ashamed, he lowered

his head and said: "This...my...this was not under my control, I did not put it on myself."

Feng BoE listened to his pitiful plight, he was angered: "Who played this kind of joke on you? I will personally pay him a visit." He stared at Ding ChunQiu, thinking that it must be the doings of the old man. You TanZhi quickly said: "No...no it's not my master." Feng BoE said: "You are a proper man, what's the big idea in putting on this iron mask? Come, I'll remove it for you." He retrieved a dagger from his boots, the blade glimmered brightly, obviously it's extremely sharp, he was about to use it to remove the mask.

You TanZhi knew the mask was stuck onto his face and the back of his head, it's interlinked with his flesh and blood, his life will be in great danger if it's forcibly removed, he quickly said: "No, no, you cannot remove it!" Feng BoE said: "Don't be scared, this dagger of mine can cut through iron as if it was made of mud, I won't harm your skin and flesh when I remove the mask." You TanZhi shouted: "No, you cannot do it." Feng BoE said: "You are scared of the person who put this mask on you, correct? When you see him next time, just say that Mr. Feng forcibly removed it and it's beyond your control, ask the evil person to come find me." As he finished speaking, he held onto You TanZhi's left wrist.

You TanZhi saw the dagger flash brightly, he was extremely shocked and shouted: "Master, master!" He turned his head to seek help from Ding ChunQiu. Ding ChunQiu was standing beside the stretcher, his attention focused solely on Huijing, he did not hear his pleas for help. Feng BoE raised his dagger, he shave the iron mask with it. You TanZhi panicked and wave his right palm, he wanted to push him away, there was a "Pai" sound, he hit Feng BoE right in the middle of his left shoulder.

Feng BoE was preoccupied with shaving the iron mask, he feared he might slip and injure You TanZhi's face, he did not guard against the palm. The strength in the palm was exceptional, Feng BoE groaned and fell down. He used his

left hand to push off the ground and got back up, with a “Wa” sound, he vomited a mouthful of fresh blood.

Deng BaiChuan, GongYe Gan, Bao BuTong, the three of them saw You TanZhi’s sneak attack, their fourth younger brother had a huge disadvantage, they were extremely shocked, when they saw Feng BoE’s deathly pale face they became even more worried. GongYe Gan took his pulse, the pulse was rapid and irregular, there seemed to be a faint trace of poisoning, he pointed at You TanZhi and cursed: “Good kid, top disciple of the Old Freak of XingXiu, requite kindness with ingratitude, you use such vicious method to injure people.” He took out a small bottle from his bosom, removed the bottle cap and took out a detoxification pill, he fed it to Feng BoE.

Deng BaiChuan and Bao BuTong body flashed, they blocked You TanZhi and Ding ChunQiu. Bao BuTong secretly gathered internal energy in his left hand, his fingers formed a claw, he was about to grab You TanZhi’s chest. Deng BaiChuan said: “Third Younger Brother, stay your hand!” Bao BuTong did not attack, his eyes shifted towards his elder brother. Deng BaiChuan said: “Our Gusu Murong family has no feud with XingXiu Sect, our fourth younger brother has good intentions in removing the iron mask, why did your XingXiu Sect injure him? I want to seek Mr. Ding for clarification.”

Ding ChunQiu saw his new disciple only need one palm stroke to injure a good fighter from Gusu Murong family, XingXiu Sect thus commanded awe-inspiring authority, he was secretly pleased and admired the miraculous effect of the frost silkworm even more, he smiled and said: “Master Feng is brave and relentless, but he also likes to poke his nose into other’s business. This disciple of mine likes to wear an iron mask, how did it obstruct your Gusu Murong family?”

GongYe Gan had supported Feng BoE into sitting position, but his whole body was shivering, his teeth chattering and grinding, it was as if he’s in a freezer, after a

while, his lips turned purple, his face also gradually turned from white to green. GongYe Gan's detoxification pill has miraculous effects, but after being consumed by Feng BoE, it seemed to vanish without a trace and had absolutely no effect at all.

GongYe Gan was desperate, he placed his hands near Feng BoE to check his breathing, suddenly, a burst of cold air entered his palm, the chill penetrated into his bones. GongYe Gan quickly withdrew his hands and said: "Not good, why is the cold so powerful?" Even the air exhaled by Feng BoE was so cold, the frost poison in him must be very serious, the situation was very dangerous, there was no time to debate who's right or wrong, he turned around and said to Ding ChunQiu: "My younger brother is poisoned by your disciple, please give us the antidote."

The poison contracted by Feng BoE was the deadly poison of the frost silkworm, forced out by the internal energy of You TanZhi's [Tendon-Changing Sutra], not to mention that Ding ChunQiu did not have the antidote for it, even if he did have it why would he surrender it? Ding ChunQiu raised his head and laughed towards the heaven and shouted: "Ah Wu Liu Lu Gong! Ah Wu Liu Lu Gong!" and flicked his sleeves, generating a burst of wind. Suddenly the XingXiu disciples all rushed out of the pavilion and quickly ran away.

Deng BaiChuan and the rest of the Shaolin monks felt this gust of wind irritated their eyes, it's really hard to bear and their tears rolled down endlessly, they could not open their eyes, they secretly cursed: "Not good!" They knew Ding ChunQiu's sleeve contained poison powder, with this flick of his sleeves, all the poison got scattered. Deng BaiChuan, GongYe Gan, Bao BuTong, all three of them blocked in front of Feng BoE, they were afraid the enemy might harm him. XuanNan shut his eyes and pushed out with his palm, it happened to hit the pillar of the pavilion, the pillar snapped immediately and half of the pavilion

collapsed and came crashing down, roof tiles and mud rained down. Everyone struggled to open their eyes, Ding ChunQiu and You TanZhi had disappeared.

A few Shaolin monks shouted: "Where is HuiJing? Where is HuiJing?" It seemed during the confusion, HuiJing was abducted by Ding ChunQiu, the empty stretcher covered the head of one Shaolin monk. XuanTong was furious: "Give chase!" and he rushed out of the pavilion. Deng BaiChuan and Bao BuTong followed him and gave chase as well. XuanNan waved his left hand and led the rest of the Shaolin monks to follow and provide assistance.

GongYe Gan was taking care of Feng BoE, both of them resting at the other intact half of the pavilion, GongYe Gan felt stinging pain in his eye, tears kept on flowing. He saw cold sweat seeping through Feng BoE's forehead, after a while it became frost. As he was getting scared and anxious, he heard the sound of footsteps, GongYe Gan raised his head, he saw Deng BaiChuan supporting Bao BuTong, they walked quickly. GongYe Gan had a huge shock, he said: "Big Brother, third younger brother is injured?" Deng BaiChuan said: "He got poisoned by that iron-head man." After a while XuanNan and the rest of the monks also returned to the pavilion. XuanTong was leaning on Xu Zhu's back, his teeth was making chattering sounds. XuanNan, Deng BaiChuan and GongYe Gan looked at each other in fear, they were at a loss on what to do.

Deng BaiChuan said: "That iron-head man and third younger brother clashed palm, after that he also clashed palm with Master XuanTong. We didn't expect....didn't expect the poison of XingXiu Sect to be so powerful."

XuanNan took out a small box from his bosom, he said: "Our school's [Six Solar Energy Pill] is effective in countering frost poison." He removed the lid of the box and took out three blood-red pills, he gave two of them to Deng BaiChuan and fed the third pill to XuanTong.



Using the time required to eat a meal, XuanTong and the other two men slowly combatted the chill until it stopped. Bao BuTong cursed loudly: "This iron-head man, da....damn it, what kind of palm strength is that?" Deng BaiChuan said: "Third Younger Brother, curse later, focus on channeling your energy." Bao BuTong said: "Not true, not true! If I don't curse now, once I die, I can't curse anymore." Deng BaiChuan smiled and said: "Don't worry, you won't die!", as he said this he pressed his palm on his back, on his 'ZhiYan' acupoint, he used his internal energy to help him drive out the frost poison. GongYe Gan and XuanNan also used their internal energy to assist Feng BoE and XuanTong to drive out the poison.

XuanNan and XuanTong had deep internal energy, after a while, XuanTong gave a long sigh and said: "It's done!" and he stood up, he continued: "Such power!" XuanNan wanted to assist Bao BuTong and Feng BoE to drive out the poison, but the other party did not request for his help, if he carelessly tried to offer his help it might be seen as looking down upon their internal energy, this was seen as breaking of taboo in the martial arts fraternity.

Suddenly, XuanTong's body swayed, his teeth start chattering again, he immediately sat down and channeled his internal energy and said: "Martial....martial brother, this frost....frost poison is....is very odd...." XuanNan quickly channeled his internal energy to assist him. The three of them circulated their internal energy continuously, the frost poison felt better for a moment, but it flared up again immediately, this went on until dusk, the three of them had already consumed three [Six Solar Energy Pill], but the frost poison was not repelled at all. XuanNan brought ten pills with him and he's left with one, he divided it into three parts and gave the three of them one each. Bao BuTong refuse to take it, he said: "Even if I consume one hundred pills, it....it won't...."

XuanNan was at his wits end, he said: “Benefactor Bao is correct, this [Six Solar Energy Pill] is not the correct remedy, our internal energy also can’t suppress this Yin-poison. In my opinion, we have to invite Divine Physician Xue, nickname ‘Enemy of King of Hell’, he can cure whatever difficult illness.” Bao BuTong said: “Great Master, you know the whereabouts of this Divine Physician?” XuanNan said: “Divine Physician Xue lives in Ancestor-Willow Town at YangZhiXi, it’s not far from here. Old monk have met him many times before, if we go to him and ask for treatment he most probably won’t reject. Gusu Murong family is renown throughout the world, Divine Physician Xue long admires you, he will definitely be gratified if he can become friends with the four of you.”

Bao BuTong said: “Not true, not true. If Divine Physician Xue sees us all, he might not be gratified. Nevertheless, everyone is afraid of my young master’s ‘Returning you with your own move’, but Divine Physician Xue is not afraid. In the future, if the Divine Physician is dying, he only have to find my young master and with his ‘Returning you with your own move’, his.....his...his old life can be saved.”

Everyone laughed out loud, they left the pavilion. They reached a small town and hired three carriages to let the three injured men to rest and recuperate. Deng BaiChuan also bought a few horses and gave them to Shaolin monks to ride.

After travelling for four to six hours, the group have to stop and assist XuanTong and the other injured men to combat the frost poison. Eventually, XuanNan did not have any inhibition and he used the divine skills of Shaolin to help Bao BuTong and Feng BoE to combat the poison. Although the route to Ancestor-Willow Town was not too far, but it passed through rugged mountain paths and they had numerous delays, they finally reached the town at dusk on the fourth day. Divine Physician Xue lived within the remote mountain thirty li north of the Ancestor-Willow Town, luckily

the Divine Physician explained the route in detail to XuanNan when they met at JuXian Manor. The group did not spend too much effort searching and they arrived outside the home of Divine Physician Xue.

XuanNan saw several large houses erected beside the river, there's a huge medicine garden in front of the houses, he knew he had arrived at the home of Divine Physician Xue. He dismounted and stepped forward, he saw two large white lanterns hanging by the door. He was surprised: "The Xue family has a sick family member?" He rushed forwards a few zhang, he saw a few sackcloth hanging over the door, a paper streamer to call back the spirit of the dead was inserted beside the door, it seemed the family was holding a funeral. He saw two rows of words written on the paper lanterns: "The funeral of Xue MuHua, died at the age of fifty five." XuanNan had a huge shock: "Divine Physician Xue can't cure himself and hence he passed away, this is terrible." As he thought about the passing of this old friend, from now on they are separated by the netherworld, he cannot help but feel sentimental and sorrowful.

Following behind him was Deng BaiChuan and GongYe Gan, they came riding on horses, both of them gasped in unison: "Ah Ya!"

Suddenly they heard cries from within the house, it's the widow: "My husband, you have divine medical skills, who would have expected you to contract this acute disease, you abandoned me and left alone. Husband, although you are called 'Enemy of King of Hell', you still can't beat the King of Hell, when you go to the netherworld, the King of Hell will settle this score with you, you are in for a hard time!"

After a while, the three carriages and six Shaolin monks arrived. Deng BaiChuan dismounted and said loudly: "Master XuanNan from Shaolin Temple, along with some friends, we have some matters and seek the help of Divine Physician Xue." His voice rang out like a large bell, the cries from within the house stopped.

After a while, an elder stepped out of the house, he's dressed like a servant, tears flowing down his face, he's very sad, he beat his chest and said: "Old master died yesterday afternoon, you all.....you all can't see him anymore."

XuanNan pressed his hands together and asked: "What is the illness contracted by Mr. Xue?" The old servant replied: "I don't know, he just suddenly stop breathing. Old Master provides treatment for others, whatever medicine he prescribes the illness will be cured....but....but....for himself...." XuanNan asked again: "Is there anyone left in Mr. Xue's family?" The old servant replied: "None, no one." Deng BaiChuan and GongYe Gan gave each other a glance, they felt the servant's tone did not contain any sadness when he said it. Moreover, they heard the cries of the widow just now. XuanNan sighed and said: "Life and death is predestined, please lead us to his coffin and let us pay our last respect." The old servant said: "This.....this.....ok." He led the group and entered the house.

GongYe Gan was one step behind, he whispered to Deng BaiChuan: "Big Brother, I think there's something odd about this incident, that old servant's behavior is suspicious." Deng BaiChuan nodded his head and followed the old servant to the mourning hall.

The furnishings in the mourning hall was crude, some items were not placed correctly, the spirit tablet contained the words: "Memorial tablet of Xue MuHua", the words were strong and forceful, obviously it's written by someone with deep learning, definitely not written by the old servant. Deng BaiChuan noted all these details but he did not comment. All of them paid their respects before the memorial tablet. GongYe Gan turned his head, he saw over ten clothes hanging on a bamboo pole in the courtyard, there was clothes for married woman and a few clothes for children, he thought: "Divine Physician Xue obviously had a wife and children, why did that old servant say there's no one in the family?"

XuanNan said: "We came from afar to seek treatment from Divine Physician Xue, we never expected Mr. Xue to pass away, this is really sad. It's getting late now, we wish to stay for the night in your esteemed home." The old servant looked very reluctant, he said: "This.....this.....en, fine! I invite all of you to rest in the hall, I will go prepare the meals." XuanNan said: "Housekeeper you don't have to spend too much effort, simple rice and vegetables are enough." The old servant replied: "Yes, yes! Everyone please sit down and rest." He led the group to the outer hall, he then entered the inner hall.

After a long time, the old servant did not come out to serve tea. XuanNan pondered: "This old servant just experienced the death of his master, it's unavoidable that he's confused. Sigh, my martial brother XuanTong contracted this frost poison, how should we deal with it?" The group waited for over an hour, but the old servant still did not appear. Bao BuTong felt restless, he said: "I will go find some water to drink" Xu Zhu said: "Mr. Bao, please sit down and rest. I will go help the old servant to boil the water." He stood up and entered the inner hall. GongYe Gan wanted to examine the movements around the house, he said: "I will accompany you."

Both of them entered the inner hall. The residence of Xue was quite large, they have five halls, but they did not see the slightest trace of a person's presence. Both of them entered the kitchen but the old servant could not be found anywhere.

GongYe Gan knew something was not right, he quickly went back to the outer hall and said: "Something is not right in this house, I think Divine Physician Xue might be faking his death." XuanNan stood up and asked: "What should we do about this?" GongYe Gan said: "Great Master, I want to examine the coffin." The group rushed to the mourning hall, he extended his hand to lift the coffin, suddenly he had a strange thought, he quickly withdrew his hand, he took a

shirt hanging on the bamboo pole and wrapped it around his hands. He gathered his internal energy and lifted the coffin, he felt it was very heavy, the coffin definitely did not contain a corpse. He said: "Divine Physician Xue really faked his death."

Feng BoE took out his blade and said: "Pry open the coffin lid and look inside." GongYe Gan said: "This person is known as Divine Physician, he's definitely an expert in poison, Fourth Younger Brother, you have to be careful." Feng BoE said: "I will keep that in mind." He inserted the tip of the blade between the lid and the coffin, he pushed upward, there was a creaking sound and the coffin lid was slowly lifted. Feng BoE held his breath, he's afraid poison powder might come out of the coffin.

Bao BuTong walked to the courtyard and caught two chickens, he returned to the mourning hall, he raised his hands and threw the two chickens, the chickens crowed loudly and moved pass the coffin and landed in front of the memorial tablet. The chickens moved towards the direction of the courtyard, but after a few steps it collapsed, their feet twitched a few times and it stopped moving and died. The wind blew from the corridor, the feathers on the chickens all scattered and flew up in the air. Everyone was dumbstruck when they saw this. The chickens just died of poisoning and all its feathers immediately dropped off, it can be said that the poison was really violent. No one dared to go near the coffin.

XuanNan said: "Benefactor Deng, what is the reason behind this? Why did Divine Physician Xue fake his own death?", as he finished he leaped upward, his left hand grabbed the crossbeam, he looked inside the coffin, the coffin was filled with rocks, within the rocks was a big bowl, the bowl was filled with clear water. This bowl of clear water was obviously the poison. XuanNan shook his head and jumped down, he said: "Even if Benefactor Xue refuses to provide treatment, there's no need to lay such elaborate

trap to harm us. Shaolin had no grievance with him, this kind of behavior, isn't it unjustifiable? Could it be.....could it be....." He said 'could it be' twice and shut his mouth, he thought: "Could it be he has some huge grievances with Gusu Murong family?"

Bao BuTong said: "There is no need for you to guess, my young master Murong has never met Divine Physician Xue, there's no need to even mention hatred or vengeance. If he's our enemy, even if our poison is ten times more unbearable, we will never come here and beg him for treatment. You think the one surname Bao and surname Feng are garbage?" XuanNan placed his hands together and said: "Benefactor Bao is correct, old monk guess wrongly." He's an eminent monk, since his heart did suspect them, even if he did not say it out loud, he should still shoulder the blame.

Deng BaiChuan said: "Poison gas is filling the entire area, it's not convenient to stay here, let's go back to the inner hall." The group went to the inner hall, they discussed with each other but still could not guess why Divine Physician Xue faked his own death and laid down the poison trap. Bao BuTong said: "This Divine Physician Xue is so vicious, let's just use fire and torch this entire place down." Deng BaiChuan said: "We can't do that, Divine Physician Xue is still considered to be a friend of Shaolin, since Master XuanNan is here we cannot act rashly."

Currently, the surroundings was pitch black, there's no light in the hall, everyone was thirsty and hungry but they dared not drink the tea and water found in the house. XuanNan said: "Let's go to a nearby farm house to ask for some water and food. Benefactors what do you think of this idea?" Deng BaiChuan said: "Yes. But it's best that we don't eat any food or drink within three li radius. This Divine Physician Xue put a lot of effort in his schemes, he won't stop at just putting a coffin, we will feel terribly apologetic if great master gets implicated again." Although he and

GongYe Gan knew the trouble was not caused by them, but the reputation of Gusu Murong's 'Returning you with your own move' was simply too great, they made quite a lot of enemies in the martial arts fraternity, some relatives of Divine Physician Xue might have been accidentally killed and this blood-debt was placed on Gusu Murong's family.

All of them stood up and walked towards the front door, suddenly they saw bright lights flashing in the west, a stream of flames dispersed and turned into green color, it covered the entire sky and came raining down, it's magnificent and beautiful. Feng BoE said: "Yi, who released this firework? Now is not the Lantern festival or the Mid-autumn festival, why are people releasing fireworks?" After a while, orange-yellow fireworks rose up to the sky, it looked like thousands of flying stars colliding with each other.

GongYe Gan thought about it and said: "This is not fireworks, it's the signal from the enemy to execute a surprise attack." Feng BoE shouted: "Wonderful, wonderful, wonderful! Let's fight to our hearts content!"

Deng BaiChuan said: "Third Brother and Fourth Brother, go wait in the hall, I will block the entrance, second brother will block the rear. Master XuanNan, this matter does not concern Shaolin, please just stand aside and watch, there's no need to help, our Murong family thank you for your great kindness."

XuanNan said: "Benefactor Deng why are you saying this? Even if the enemy has some hatred towards you, there must be some truth and falsehood or misunderstanding, we have to be impartial, we cannot allow them to take advantage of your misfortune and rely on their numbers to win. If it's the gang of people dispatched by Divine Physician Xue, they laid down this trap and tried to poison us, we share a common enemy, how can we stand by and do nothing? Everyone, prepare yourself to meet the enemy!" HuiFang, Xu Zhu and the rest of the monks agreed in unison. XuanTong said: "Benefactor Deng, I and your two brothers



share the same poison, we should collaborate and repel the enemy.”

As they were talking, another two fireworks rose up into the sky, this time it was much nearer. After a while, another two fireworks appeared, a total of six fireworks had been fired. The shape and color of the fireworks were different, some looked like a large pen, some looked like a chessboard, some looked like an axe, some looked like a large peony. After the fireworks had been fired, the sky was pitch black again.

XuanNan ordered the six Shaolin disciples to guard all four sides of the house. But after a long time, they did not hear any movement from the enemy.

Everyone held their breath and focused their attention, after the time taken to eat a meal, they suddenly heard a female voice singing to the east: “For days my eyebrows are unpainted, and my handkerchief soaked in tears. Since your Majesty cares nothing for me, why should I care for my looks? How can a mere chest of pearls bring solace to my lonely existence?”

When the voice finished singing the song, immediately it turned into the voice of a man and said: “AiYo, Lady Jiang, I have not seen you for a long time, I miss you very much, I bestow you a string of pearls, Lady Jiang please accept it.” After finishing, the voice turned into a female and said: “Your Majesty already have Consort Yang as your companion, you even abandoned your court sessions, when did you ever place this ill-fated woman in your heart, sigh.....”, as she said this, she starting crying.

Xu Zhu and the rest of the monks were unfamiliar with worldly affairs, the person suddenly became male and female, not knowing what kind of trick it was, they felt miserable. Deng BaiChun and the rest knew the person was acting out the story between Emperor Ming of Tang and the Plum Consort, suddenly becoming Plum Consort, suddenly becoming the Emperor, the voice and tone remarkably

accurate, but this person suddenly appeared at this juncture, they have some misgivings and unsure about the person's intentions.

The person said: "My lady, don't cry, quickly prepare a feast, you will play the flute and I will personally sing a tune for you to relieve your worries." The person's voice changed to a female and said: "Lowly concubine wash her face with tears every evening, I only hope to see your Majesty again, now that I get to see you again, I will die contented, goodbye, \*cough\*.....\*cough\*....."

Bao BuTong shouted loudly: "I am An Lushan! Tang Emperor Li Longji, you are a muddleheaded emperor, quickly hand over Yang Yuhuan!"

The person stop crying immediately and gave an "Ah" sound, apparently he had a huge shock.

The surroundings was silent again.

## Chapter 30: Casually Binding the Hero

Fan translation by d4rksinz [Third Edition]

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After a while, they smelled a faint flowery scent. XuanNan shouted: "The enemy is releasing poison, quickly hold your breaths, smell the antidote." But after a while, he felt strange, he was clear-headed and refreshed, it seemed the flowery scent did not carry any poison.

The person said: "Seventh Sister, is that you? There were some strange person in fifth brother's house, he claims he's An Lushan." A female voice said: "Only big brother has yet to arrive. Second Brother, Third Brother, Fourth Brother, Sixth Brother, Eighth brother, let us reveal ourselves!"

When she finished, there was a bright light outside the door, a strange ball of light shone on five men and one woman. A black beard old man among them said: "Fifth Brother, quickly come out." His right hand held onto a square wooden board. The female was a pretty middle-aged married woman. For the other four men, two of them were dressed as scholars, one of them seemed to be a carpenter, hand holding onto an axe and carrying a long saw on his back. The other man was green-faced and long-toothed, red hair and green beard, his appearance extremely scary, he looked like a monster, he's wearing a bright shining brocade robe.

Deng BaiChuan fixed his concentration, he saw the person oil painted his face, it was not his original appearance, he dressed himself like an opera actor, thus the one acting as Tang Emperor and Plum Consort was obviously this person, Deng BaiChuan said loudly: "May I request the honorable names of ladies and gentlemen? I am Deng BaiChuan from Gusu Murong family."

The other party did not have the chance to reply as a black figure rushed out from the main hall, his blade shining, he chopped seven times towards the opera actor, it was Feng BoE. The opera actor was caught off guard, he hid to the east and dodged to the west, he was in an awkward situation. The opera actor started singing: "My strength plucked up the hills, my might shadowed the world; But the times were against me, and Dapple (name of warhorse) runs no more; when Dapple runs no more, what then can....." but Feng BoE's attack was too quick and he could not finish the third sentence.

The black bearded guy cursed: "Hey you are too unreasonable, rushing out and hacking and chopping randomly, eat my [Big Iron Net]", the wooden board in his hands flashed and he whacked straight towards the top of Feng BoE's head.

Feng BoE felt some misgivings: "I have fought over hundreds of major and minor battle, but I have never seen such square wood board being used as a weapon." He raised his broadsword and chopped towards the board. There was a ringing sound, the broadsword hit the edge of the board, but the board was motionlessly, although the board may seem like it's made of wood but it's actually made of steel, the exterior of the board was painted to make it resemble wood. Feng BoE promptly withdrew his broadsword, surprisingly when he contracted his arm the broadsword could not be withdrawn, it was stuck firmly on the steel board. Feng BoE was shocked, he channeled his internal energy and exerted his force, only now did the broadsword separate from the steel board, he shouted: "What an abnormal object! Is this steel board made of lodestone?"

That person smiled and said: "Not really, not really! This is my working tool." Feng BoE shot another glance at it, he saw many horizontal and vertical lines on the board, it's a Go (Chess) board, he said: "What a weird object, come I will fight with you!" He swung his broadsword like the wind,

attacking faster and faster, but he dared not let the broadsword touch the magnetic chess board.

The opera actor regained his breath and sang again: "When Dapple runs no more, what then can I do? Ah, Yu, my Yu, what will your fate be?" Suddenly, he imitated the voice of a female, he said in a gentle coy voice: "Worry not my Lord, although today's battle is unsuccessful, lowly concubine will follow you and fight our way out of this encirclement."

Bao BuTong said: "Shameless King of Chu and Consort Yu, quickly commit suicide, I am Han Xin." He jumped and extended his palm, trying to grab the shoulder of the opera actor. The opera actor avoided it and sang: "A great wind came forth, the clouds rose on high. Where will I find.....AiYa, my Gaozu of Han killed your Han Xin." His left hand went to his waist and took out a soft whip and he lashed it out towards Bao BuTong.

XuanNan saw both sides were acting like children, but their martial arts were solid, only that they don't know each other, his eyebrows narrowed slightly and said: "Everyone please temporarily stay your hands, let us clarify the matter first."

But asking Feng BoE to stay his hands and stop fighting was almost impossible, when he contracted the frost poison, his physical strength and stamina was not the same as before, in addition the frost poison can flare up anytime, it's extremely dangerous, his broadsword flashed about as if it was shredding the wind, he wanted to achieve victory quickly.

As the four of them engaged in fierce battle, someone came out of the main hall, there was a clashing sound as two Buddhist monk's knives collided, an awe-inspiring entrance, it was XuanTong. He shouted: "You bunch of wicked thieves, using poison and harming people, old monk will break his taboo and kill you all!" He was tormented by the frost poison for many days, he could not vent his frustration, thus he did

not bother to clarify and attacked the two scholars with his twin-knife. One scholar dodged and avoided, the other scholar took out a judge-pen weapon from his bosom, he executed his skills and started fighting with XuanTong.

The other scholar shook his head from side to side and said: "This is so strange! Why is this monk so hot tempered, I wonder where he comes from?" He extended his hands into his bosom and felt around, he said: "Yi, where did it go?" He touched his left and right pockets, shook his sleeves, and patted his chest, he can't find it anywhere.

Xu Zhu was sympathetic, he ask: "Benefactor, what are you looking for?" The scholar said: "This big monk's martial arts is extremely high, my brother is not his match, I want to find my weapon and join the fight, Yi, strange, strange! Where did my weapon go?" He knocked his forehead and pondered deeply. Xu Zhu cannot help but laugh, he thought: "Coming out for a fight but forgetting where you put your weapon, this is interesting." He asked again: "Benefactor, what kind of weapon do you use?"

The scholar said: "Diplomacy is better than violence, my number one weapon is a book." Xu Zhu said: "What kind of book? Martial arts manual?" The scholar said: "No, no. It's the Analects of Confucius, I want to use the words of sage to reform my opponent." Bao BuTong interrupted: "You are a scholar, you can't even memorize the Analects of Confucius, what's the point of studying?" The scholar said: "Elder brother, you only know part of the information. The 'Analects of Confucius', 'Mencius', 'Spring and Autumn Annals', 'Book of Songs', I know all of them by heart. But a Buddhist monk only study Buddhist scriptures, they might not know about Confucius literature, I can recite it out by heart but if he has no knowledge about it, won't it be useless? Thus, I must show him the original text as evidence, then he can't deny it or try to dispute it, only then will it be useful. There is a common saying, 'Use book as evidence'." As he said this, he kept on searching and patting around his body.

Bao BuTong shouted: "Little master, quickly attack him!" Xu Zhu said: "I will wait for Benefactor to find his weapon, after that we can fight." The scholar said: "The Song and Chu fought at a deep river, the Chu people has yet to cross the river, their formation not ready, it's a good opportunity to attack, but Duke Xiang of Song said: It's not the way of nobleman to take advantage of the plight of others. Little master, your heart is benevolent, the same as Duke Xiang."

The carpenter saw XuanTong's twin-knife flying and twisting around, his moves were extremely quick and powerful, the two scholars will be in danger if the fight dragged on further, he raised his axe and wanted to assist them in battle. GongYe Gan waved his palm and struck towards him. GongYe Gan's appearance was refine and cultured, but his palm strength was vigorous and forceful, he's nicknamed 'Jiangnan Number Two', last time he competed wine drinking and matched palm with Xiao Feng, although he lost, Xiao Feng had deep respect for him, it can be seen that his internal energy was extraordinary, the carpenter slanted his body to avoid the palm and hacked his axe horizontally.

The scholar still could not find his 'Analects of Confucius', he saw his companion's judge-pen movement was really messy, it really wasn't a match against XuanTong's twin-knife, he said to XuanTong: "Hey, big monk. Confucius says: [The superior man does not, even for the space of a single meal, act contrary to virtue. In moments of haste, he cleaves to it. In seasons of danger, he cleaves to it.] Confucius says: [To subdue one's self and return to propriety, is perfect virtue. If a man can for one day subdue himself and return to propriety, all under heaven will ascribe perfect virtue to him.] Confucius also says: [Look not at what is contrary to propriety; listen not to what is contrary to propriety; speak not what is contrary to propriety; make no movement which is contrary to propriety.] You wave your twin-knife randomly,

you are ruthless and only thinks about killing people, you did not show self-restraint, this is contrary to propriety.”

Xu Zhu whispered to Shaolin monk HuiFang: “Martial uncle, is this person pretending to be dumb?” HuiFang shook his head and said: “I don’t know. Our master instructed us to be careful when going out of Shaolin Temple, martial artists are cunning and sly, they can come up with all sorts of funny ideas and traps.”

The bookworm said to XuanTong again: “Big monk, Confucius says: [Men of principle are sure to be bold, but those who are bold may not always be men of principle.] You are brave and bold, but you might not be benevolent, you cannot be considered to be a true gentleman. Confucius says: [What you do not want done to yourself, do not do to others] If other people want to kill you, you will naturally be unwillingly to die, since you are unwillingly to die, how can you kill other people?”

XuanTong engaged this bookworm and both of them jumped about, he waved his twin-knife to attack, the bookworm followed XuanTong and suddenly moved east and west, sometimes left and right, he’s always within three feet of XuanTong, constantly advising and persuading, it can be seen that his martial art was not weak. XuanTong was secretly vigilant: “This rascal is spouting nonsense, obviously he’s trying to distract me and divert my concentration, once he finds a gap in my moves, he will definitely exploit it and attack. This person’s martial art is above the scholar with the judge-pen, I definitely have to guard against him.” Thus, he spent sixty percent of his concentration to guard against the bookworm and spent forty percent to focus on attacking the scholar with the judge-pen. The situation of the scholar with the judge-pen improved considerably.

After exchanging ten moves, XuanTong was getting impatient, he shouted: “Get lost!” and flipped his Buddhist monk’s knife, smashing the handle of the knife towards the



chest of the bookworm. The bookworm avoided it and said: "Great Master, your martial art is extremely strong, my fourth brother and I, although it's two against one we might not be your match, thus I advise you with wise words and hope that we can stop fighting, Confucius says: [Tsang, my doctrine is that of an all-pervading unity.] Tsang said: [The doctrine of master is to be true to the principles of our nature and the benevolent exercise of them to others - this and nothing more.] As human beings, we must be prepared to forgive, we cannot be unreasonable and barbaric."

XuanTong felt indignant, he slashed his knife horizontally and cursed: "Be prepared to forgive? Be compassionate? Why did you put deadly poison in the coffin to harm others? If old monk is not careful, he would have died long ago, you still dare say: [What you do not want done to yourself, do not do to others], you want to die of poisoning?"

The bookworm quickly retreated two steps and said: "Strange! Strange! Who put poison in the coffin? The coffin is for corpses. Confucius says: [Li died, he had a coffin but no outer shell.] There is poison in the coffin, won't the corpse die of poisoning? Oh wait, the corpse died long ago."

Bao BuTong interrupted: "Not true, Not true. You did not put any corpse in the coffin, only poison, you wanted to poison us, the living people." The bookworm shook his head and said: "You gauge the heart of a gentleman with your own mean measures. Since there is no coffin here, there is no poison."

Bao BuTong said: "Confucius says: [Of all people, female and vile people are the most difficult people.] You are a vile person." He pointed at the middle-aged woman and said: "You are a female, both of you are indeed difficult people. Are the words of Confucius wrong?" The bookworm was stumped for words, he finally said: "You digress from the main topic, I don't have to bother about your words or give a reply."

The bookworm was debating with Bao BuTong, XuanTong had one less person to deal with and he intensified his attacks, the judge-pen scholar was instantly in dire situation. The bookworm moved closer to XuanTong and said: "Confucius says: [If a man be without the virtues proper to humanity, what has he to do with the rites of propriety? If a man be without the virtues proper to humanity, what has he to do with music?] Big monk, you are without the virtues proper to humanity, you are really disappointing to the extreme."

XuanTong was furious, he said: "I am a Buddhist, detach from worldly affairs, you rotten scholar talking about literature, etiquette and music, benevolent or not, you cannot sway my heart."

The bookworm raised his knuckles and knocked his forehead, he said: "Very true! Very true! I studied too much and became foolish, I am really a bookworm. Big monk is obviously a Buddhist, but I advise you with words from Confucius and the traditional virtues, naturally you won't understand it."

Feng BoE fought for a long time with the chessboard-wielding person, it's hard to predict who will win, after a period of time, he started to feel the frost poison acting up in his lower abdomen. Bao BuTong compared himself with the opera actor, he felt his opponent's martial art was not high, but his moves was extremely complicated, sometimes he acted as Xi Shi (one of the renowned Four Beauties of ancient China), his speech and laughter coy, his frown infectious, his steps lithe and graceful, it was the exact manner of a woman of peerless elegance, in an instant, he started to act as a tipsy and romantic Li Bai (renowned poet), his drunken state unpredictable, his footsteps unsteady. The miraculous thing was that when he acted as different character, he always had a unique set of martial arts to fit the character, sometimes he used his flexible whip or flicked his long sleeves when acting as a beauty, or

waved his pen when acting as a scholar, and Bao BuTong could not deal with him for the moment.

The bookworm was motionless for a while, suddenly he hummed: "Since you gave up immersing in music, your heart should have gained benevolence, if you did not gain it quickly, it's already ingrained in your heart?" XuanNan and XuanTong both had a huge shock, they thought: "This bookworm is extremely knowledgeable, he can even recite verses by Easter Jin eminent monk, Kumarajiva." The bookworm continued humming: "After all, in emptiness, there is no music in heart, if you are pleased with knowledge on Buddhism, you are not enlightened by its teachings. Falsehood lies and deceit, it will not stop near your heart. Big monk, what is the next two verse, I forgot." XuanTong said: "Buddhist teachings acquired by a humane person, it will reveal itself when desired by the heart."

The bookworm laughed heartily and said: "Enlightening! Enlightening! You are a great Buddhist master, how can you not be humane? Moral principles under the heaven, all of them are the same. I advise you to let go of your hatred and turn back to correct path."

XuanTong's heart was shaken, he suddenly achieved enlightenment and said: "Excellent! Excellent! Excellent! Namu Amitufo, Namu Amitufo." There was two clanking sound, the twin-Buddhist monk's knife was thrown on the floor, he sat down on the floor, his face revealed a smile, his eyes closed.

The judge-pen scholar was getting excited in the fight, but suddenly seeing this behavior, he had a huge shock and did not attack with this judge-pen.

Xu Zhu said: "Martial grandfather, did your frost poison flare up?" He extended his arm to support him, XuanNan said: "Don't move!" He checked XuanTong's breath, but he had stop breathing, he had passed away. XuanNan pressed both his hands together, he chanted the 'Afterlife Prayer'. The rest of the Shaolin monk saw XuanTong had passed

away, they started crying, they grabbed their Buddhist's staff and Buddhist's knife, wanting to go all out against the two scholars. XuanNan said: "Stop! Martial brother XuanTong perceived Tathata in his meditation, he's in Nirvana, he has achieved enlightenment, we have to be happy for him."

After witnessing this shocking event, everyone stopped fighting immediately and retreated simultaneously.

The bookworm shouted: "Fifth Brother, Fifth Brother Xue, quickly come out, someone got excited to death by my words. Quickly come out and save him! Damn Divine Physician Xue, if you don't come out quickly, this person will really die for certain!" Deng BaiChuan said: "Divine Physician Xue is not in his house, Mr. you are....." The bookworm was still shouting hurriedly at the top of his voice: "Xue MuHua, Fifth Brother Xue, Enemy of King of Hell, Divine Physician Xue, quickly come out and save him! Your third brother excited someone till death, they are going to make life difficult for us."

Bao BuTong was furious: "You caused his death yet still pretending to be a good guy and shedding crocodile tears." With a 'Hu' sound he send his palm at him, his left hand passed under his right palm, with this move [Dragon Searching For Pearl], he made a grab for the beard. The bookworm quickly dodged it. Feng BoE and GongYe Gan was aroused from their previous fights, they did not wish to stop and hence they started fighting again.

Deng BaiChuan shouted: "Lie down!" His left hand stretched out and grabbed the back of the opera actor. Deng BaiChuan was chief among the subordinates of Gusu Murong family, his martial art was strong, internal energy powerful and vigorous, although his reputation wasn't impressive, but of those who knew him they cannot help but deeply respect him. He easily caught hold of the back of the opera actor, he pressed him down towards the floor. The opera actor was quite agile and nimble, when his left shoulder touched the

ground, he spun his body on the floor and swept his right leg out, kicking towards Deng BaiChuan's leg. This move was extremely strange and quick, Deng BaiChuan was stout and strong hence it's not convenient for him to turn or rotate quickly, he saw this move was hard to avoid, he immediately gathered his internal energy into his lower body to forcibly receive the kick to his leg, there was a 'Ka La' sound, the two legs collided and one of the leg broke.

The opera actor kept rolling about and he's already a few zhang away, he shouted: "You treacherous bandit, injuring an honest man, ouch my leg!" It seemed that when the two legs met and the force collided, the opera actor was not a match against his opponent's force, his leg broke immediately.

The pretty middle-aged woman only stood courteously by the side and did not participate, when she saw the opera actor suffered a broken leg and her other companions also in danger, she said: "Who are you people, what is the reason for occupying my fifth brother's house? You did not clarify the situation and injure people?" Although she's questioning the other party, her tone and manner was still soft and refined. The opera actor was lying on the ground, he looked upward and saw two lanterns hanging by the door of the house. He pointed at the lantern and called out in shock: "What? What is this? What 'Funeral of Xue MuHua', my fifth brother died?"

The person wielding the chessboard, the two scholars, the axe-wielding carpenter, the pretty middle-aged woman, their gaze followed the finger and they saw the lantern. The candle flame in the lantern had long died out, the surrounding was pitch-black, as everyone was busy fighting, no one paid any attention to the lantern, only when the opera actor fell onto the floor did he finally raised his head and noticed the wordings on the lantern.

The opera actor burst into tears, he sang: "Alas, alas, my good brother, we swore brotherhood at the peach garden,

we agreed to meet at the ancient city, you cross the five passes, slay six generals, such awe-inspiring might ....." He's singing the opera 'Weeping GuanYu', but he's too agitated and his accent was incorrect. The other five also bellowed their grievances:

"Who killed my fifth brother?"

"Fifth Brother, Fifth Brother, which damnable murderer harmed you?"

"We will fight to the death with you today!"

XuanNan and Deng BaiChuan gave each other a glance, both of them had the same thought: "These people seemed to be the sworn brothers of Divine Physician Xue." Deng BaiChuan said: "Some of our companions suffered some injuries, we came here to request Divine Physician Xue for medical treatment, but unexpectedly..." The middle-aged woman replied: "But unexpectedly he refused to treat and you people killed him, correct?" Deng BaiChuan said: "No....." He did not get the chance to finish as he saw the middle-aged woman flicked her sleeves, suddenly he smelled a strong fragrance and he immediately became dizzy, he seemed to be standing on soft cloud and shrouded in mist, he can't maintain his footing. The pretty middle-aged woman said: "Collapse, collapse!"

Deng BaiChuan was indignant, he shouted: "Wicked witch!" He gathered his energy into his palm and sent his palm out. The pretty middle-aged woman saw Deng BaiChuan shaking and swaying about, he's already affected by her attack, amazingly he still managed to send out his palm. As she was about to dodge the attack, it was too late, the earth-shattering force came crashing onto her, her breathing was temporarily obstructed, her body flew up. There was a 'Ka la Ka la' sound, a few of her ribs got broken, she fainted before her body had landed on the ground. Deng BaiChuan's vision turned black and he collapsed onto the ground.

Both sides lost one of their fighters, the remaining people started fighting with each other. XuanNan pondered: "There is some strange matters in this incident, we have to first capture the rest so as to avoid unnecessary casualties for both sides." He said: "Get my staff!" HuiFang turned around and picked up the Buddhist monk's staff leaning against the door, he passed it over to XuanNan. The judge-pen wielding scholar vaulted over and waved his right hand to attack HuiFang's chest. XuanNan struck out with his left palm, his palm had yet to arrive but the palm force had already reached his opponent's back, the scholar was hit and collapsed. XuanNan gave a laugh, he carried the staff in his hand, took two steps forward, brandished his staff and smashed towards the chessboard wielding man.

The chessboard-wielding person saw the attack was extremely powerful, the staff had yet to arrive but the accompanying wind had already shrouded his entire body, immediately he flexed his arm, he used both hands to raise the chessboard and blocked the staff, there was a loud ringing sound, sparks flew in all directions. The person felt his arms going numb, the web between his thumb and forefinger had split open. XuanNan raised his staff and he also lifted the chessboard along with it. The chessboard had extremely strong magnetism, in the past it trapped the weapons of numerous enemies, but today it met a strong opponent and got trapped by XuanNan's staff. XuanNan smashed his staff towards the head of the person along with the chessboard. The person shouted: "This 'Pressing Divine Head' (the name of a chess move) along with 'Leaning Cover', I can't resist both attacks!" He quickly scuttled forward.

XuanNan dragged his staff and shouted loudly: "Bookworm, lie down!" He swept his staff horizontally, the power in it was unstoppable. The bookworm said: "Confucius is adaptable to current situation, once the wind blows the grass will topple, since you want me to lie down I will lie

down, why not?" Before he even finished his words, he's already lying down on the floor. A few Shaolin monk jumped over and held him down.

The Head-Monk of Shaolin Damo-Hall was really outstanding, once he started fighting, he immediately subdued three experts from the opposing side.

The axe-wielding carpenter was fighting Feng BoE and Bao BuTong, he's in dire situation and was about to suffer a defeat, the chessboard-wielding person said: "Forget it, forget it! Sixth Brother, let us just admit defeat, we don't have to carry on playing this chess match anymore. Big monk, I want to ask you, how did my fifth brother offend you, why did you people kill him?" XuanNan said: "There is no such matter....."

Before he could finish, suddenly there was two 'Zheng Zheng' sound of zither, it was transmitted from afar. When the sound was transmitted to their eardrum, everyone's heart violently palpitated two times. XuanNan was startled for the duration, another two 'Zheng Zheng' sound rang out. This time the sound was even closer, and everyone's heart palpitated even more violently. Feng BoE felt a sense of uneasiness, his right hand relaxed, with a 'Dang' sound his broadsword dropped on the floor. Luckily Bao BuTong quickly waved his palm and guarded him, else the enemy's axe would have split open his shoulder. The bookworm shouted: "Elder Brother, come over quickly, Elder Brother, come over quickly! The situation was extremely serious! Why are you moving so slowly and still playing that stupid zither? Confucius says: [When the prince summoned him, without waiting for his carriage to be yoked, he went at once.]"

The sound of zither kept on ringing, an elderly man with big sleeves strolled towards them, his forehead high and protruding, his appearance odd and ancient, he's beaming and his expression was extremely amiable, he carried a jade zither in his hand.



When the bookworm and the rest of his brothers saw this man, they shouted: "Elder Brother!" The elderly man walked towards XuanNan, cupped his fists and said: "Old man is lacking in manners, may I know the name of this Shaolin eminent monk?" XuanNan pressed his hands together and said: "Old monk is XuanNan." The man said: "Hehe, so you are Martial Brother XuanNan. Shaolin's XuanKu must be your younger martial brother correct? Old man met him several times before, our conversation was extremely congenial, he must still be pretty healthy and strong." XuanNan said sadly: "Martial Brother XuanKu was plotted against by a treacherous disciple, he had passed away and returned to Western Paradise."

The person stood wooden for quite a while, suddenly he leaped upwards, it was a zhang high, his body has yet to reach the ground but his sorrowful voice can be heard in mid-air, he was crying. XuanNan and GongYe Gan were startled, they did not expect such an elderly man to cry as if he was a child. When both his feet touched the ground, he immediately sat down, he pulled forcefully at his beard, both his legs were like drum-stick, repeatedly beating and drumming the ground, he cried out: "XuanKu, why didn't you meet me one last time before you die? Isn't this ridiculous? My song 'Peaceful PuAn in Sanskrit', many people heard it before but they don't understand the logic within, but you said this song is rooted in Buddhism, you listened to it again and again. My Younger Martial Brother XuanNan, he might not have your level of comprehension, if I play zither for him, most probably it's like playing zither to a cow, preaching to deaf ears! Alas! My life is ill fated!"

Initially, when XuanNan heard him cry, he thought he was a sentimental person, overcome by his grief he cried out in sorrow, but subsequently, he found out that he's grieving over the loss of a person who understands his music, astoundingly, he even said he's playing zither to a cow if he had to play for him. XuanNan was an eminent monk of high

virtue, he wasn't offended at all, he only gave a slight smile and thought: "These bunch of people are crazy and wild. The temperament of this person is notoriously similar to the rest of his group, birds of a feather flock together."

The person continued crying: "XuanKu ah, XuanKu, to repay you for being my soul-mate, I put in great effort and created this new song for you, it's called 'Humming of A Reed', this song is to praise your Shaolin founder Master Damo for his great achievement in crossing the river with a reed. Why don't you listen to it?" Suddenly, he turned his head and said to XuanNan: "Where is the tomb of Martial Brother XuanKu? Quickly bring me there, quickly, quickly! The quicker the better. I will play this new song at his tomb, maybe it can help him to relax and be carefree, he can even revive from the dead."

XuanNan said: "Benefactor, please don't babble nonsense, after my martial brother passed away, his body had been cremated and turned to ashes."

The person was expressionless, suddenly he jumped up and said: "Very good, then you have to give me his ashes. I will use cowhide glue and stick his ashes in my zither, henceforth every time I play a song, he will definitely get to hear it. Isn't it a great idea? Haha, haha, isn't my idea great?" He was getting more and more excited, he cannot help but clap and laugh out heartily, suddenly he saw a pretty middle-aged woman lying on the floor, he cried out in fright: "Yi, Seventh Sister, what happened? Who injure you?"

XuanNan said: "There is some misunderstanding, we are still in the midst of clarifying the situation." The person said: "What misunderstanding? Who misunderstood who? To cut the long story short, whoever injured seventh sister is the one at fault. Oh my goodness, eighth brother is also injured, the one who injured him is not a good person, how many bad persons are here? Quickly step up and confess, we will openly discuss it, there is no room for concession."

The opera actor called out: "Elder brother, they killed fifth brother, quickly take revenge for fifth brother." The expression of the person turned grave, he shouted: "Preposterous! Fifth brother is the 'Enemy of King of Hell', what can the King of Hell do against him?" XuanNan said: "Divine Physician Xue faked his own death, there is only poison in the coffin, there is no corpse." The elderly man and the rest of his brothers were elated, all of them asked in quick succession:

"Why did fifth brother fake his death?"

"Where is his dead body?"

"He didn't die, how can there be a dead body?"

Suddenly a soft voice floated from afar: "Xue MuHua, Xue MuHua, your martial uncle is arriving, quickly come out and welcome him." The voice seemed to be breaking yet continuing, the distance was very far, but the voice was clear and distinct, obviously it was transmitted by someone with very profound internal energy, it's really no small matter.

The opera actor, bookworm, carpenter and the rest all cried out in alarm. The elderly man with the zither called out: "Catastrophe is coming, catastrophe is coming!" He kept looking in all directions, his expression extremely frightened, he said: "There is no time to escape, quick, quick, everyone hide in the house."

Bao BuTong said loudly: "What catastrophe is coming? Is the sky falling down?" The elderly man said in a trembling voice: "Quick, quick, go in the house quickly! It's better to have the sky falling down, this ....." Bao BuTong said: "Senior please make yourself at home, but I don't want to go in."

The elderly man suddenly extended his hand, he caught hold of Bao BuTong's chest acupoints. This move was extremely quick, Bao BuTong could not guard against it at all, he's already subdued, his body was lifted up and was quickly carried into the house.

XuanNan and GongYe Gan were astonished, as they were about to speak the chessboard wielding person whispered: "Great Master and everyone please go into the house quickly, an extremely powerful devil is coming soon." XuanNan possessed divine skills, he rarely meet any match in the martial arts fraternity, he was not afraid of any big or small devil, he asked: "Which big devil? Qiao Feng?" The person shook his head and said: "No, no, someone even more vicious than Qiao Feng. It's Old Freak of XingXiu." XuanNan said: "If it's the Old Freak of XingXiu then it couldn't be much better, old monk was looking for him." The person said: "Great Master, your martial art is strong, naturally you are not afraid. But everyone here will be tortured till death by him and you will be the only one left alive, you are really merciful."

His words were sarcastic and meant to ridicule, but it was also accurate and true, XuanNan was temporarily stumped, he finally said: "Good, everyone let us go in the house!"

At this moment, the zither elderly man had hidden Bao BuTong and came rushing out of the house, he kept urging: "Quick, quickly! Still waiting for what?" Feng BoE questioned him loudly: "Where is my third brother?" The elderly man flipped his left hand and send his palm horizontally towards Feng BoE right cheek. The frost poison in Feng BoE had already flared up, it's really hard to bear, when he saw the palm coming he quickly lowered his head to avoid it. Unpredictably, the elderly man did not fully execute his palm move, suddenly he diverted his energy downwards and he caught Feng BoE's nape, he said: "Quick, quick, go in quickly!" He lifted Feng BoE like a chicken and carried him into the house.

GongYe Gan saw the elderly man did not have any evil intentions, but both his sworn brothers were subdued by him with a single move, he shouted loudly and was about to fight with him, but the elderly man move like the wind, he already rushed into the house. The bookworm carried the

opera actor, the carpenter supported the pretty woman and all of them quickly rushed into the house.

XuanNan felt today's affair was really strange and weird, he did not want to be reckless to avoid causing more confusion, he said: "Benefactor GongYe, let us just go in first and then take our time to decide what to do."

Immediately, Xu Zhu and HuiFang lifted the corpse of XuanTong, GongYe Gan carried Deng BaiChuan and all of them entered the house.

The zither old man came out to urge them, but he saw everyone had entered the house, he quickly shut the front door, he went to fetch the door latch. The chessboard wielding person said: "Elder brother, it's best if we left this door wide open, this move is called solid yet empty, empty yet solid. This way, he won't dare to enter the house without careful consideration." The elderly man said: "What? Fine, I will listen to you. This.....will this work?" He did not have any self-confidence at all while speaking.

XuanNan and GongYe Gan gave each other a glance, both of them had the same thought: "This old man has superior martial arts, how can he be so flustered when dealing with important matters? This door, it can't even hold back common robbers, how can it stop the Old Freak of XingXiu, what difference does it make if the door was open or close? It seemed this person suffered great loss against the Old Freak of XingXiu, he became like a bird startled by a bowshot, he's terror-stricken once he knew the Old Freak of XingXiu was nearby."

The elderly man said repeatedly: "Sixth Brother, think of an idea, quickly think of an idea."

Although XuanNan possessed considerable self-restraint, he was riled up by the fearful manner of the old man, he said: "Sir, there is a common saying 'counter soldiers with arms, water with earth', adopt measures appropriate to the situation. No matter how vicious this Old Freak of XingXiu is, we will join hands and fight him together, we might not lose,

there's no need to be so....so....hei....so cautious and timid." The candles in the hall had been lighted, he glimpsed his surroundings, the elderly man was terrified, the chessboard wielding man, the bookworm, carpenter, judge-pen wielding scholar, all of them wearing fearful expressions. XuanNan personally witnessed the martial arts of these people, they weren't weak, they were wild and unrestrained, they appeared to be elegant and unconventional warriors, but now they turned into children and useless cowards, it's really inconceivable.

GongYe Gan saw Bao BuTong and Feng BoE were fine, both of them sitting on a chair, but their frost poison had flared up and they shivered constantly, he supported Deng BaiChuan to a chair and made him sit down, fortunately Deng BaiChuan's pulse was even, he's only in some sort of drunken state and he carried on sleeping, his life was not in any danger.

Everyone looked at each other in dismay, after a short period of time, the axe-wielding carpenter took out a set square from his bosom, he measured the corners of the hall and shakes his head, he picked up a candlestick and walked to the rear hall. Everyone followed him, they saw him measuring the four corners, suddenly he leaped up onto the beam and started measuring it, he shook his head again and walked to the rear, stopping in front of Divine Physician Xue's fake coffin, he looked at the coffin a few times, shook his head and said: "What a pity, what a pity!" The zither elderly man said: "It's useless?" The carpenter said: "It won't work, martial uncle will definitely see through it." The zither man said in anger: "You.....you still call him martial uncle?" The carpenter shook his head and did not reply, he continued walking to the rear.

GongYe Gan thought: "This person seems to only know how to shake his head, he doesn't do anything else."

The carpenter measured the corners of the wall, he counted his footsteps and made some calculation with his

fingers, it seemed as if he's trying to build a house, he kept counting his steps and walked to the rear garden. He held onto the candlestick and pondered for quite some time, the corridor of the garden had five stone mortars, he grasped a few dried husks and soil and put them in the mortar, he lifted the large stone pestle by the side and started pounding the mortar, 'Peng Peng', the stone was dense and was forceful as it landed on the mortar.

GongYe Gan gave a sigh and thought: "We are really down on luck, meeting these bunch of lunatics, he still has the mood to pound grains in this kind of dire situation. It's still acceptable if he's really pounding grains, but the mortar contains grain husk and soil, alas!" Bao BuTong and Feng BoE were resting in the hall due to their frost poison, but after a while, they also rushed to the rear garden.

'Peng', 'Peng', 'Peng', 'Peng', 'Peng', 'Peng'! The pounding sound uninterrupted.

Bao BuTong said: "Buddy, are you pounding the grains for cooking? But you aren't pounding grains. I suggest we better plow the field and plant corn seeds, when they grow....." Suddenly, the southeast corner of the garden, around seven to eight zhang away, gave a squeaking sound. The sound was soft but rather unique. XuanNan, GongYe Gan and the rest looked towards the direction of the sound, they saw four dwarf cassia trees.

'Peng', 'Peng', the carpenter kept on pounding, but the strange thing was that the second cassia tree from right started shaking, little by little it moved. After a while, everyone understood, when the carpenter pound the mortar, the cassia tree will move around an inch. The zither man cheered and rushed towards the cassia tree, he said in a low voice: "Not bad, not bad!" Everyone followed him and ran over. The cassia tree had moved aside, revealing a big stone slab, an iron ring was attached to the slab.

GongYe Gan was impressed and he felt ashamed, he said: "This secret underground mechanism is ingeniously

arranged, it's really fantastic. My dear friend, you discovered it within such a short time, you are really intelligent and wise, no less inferior than the creator of the mechanism." Bao BuTong said: "Not true, not true, how do you know this mechanism isn't created by him?" GongYe Gan said: "I said his ability and wisdom isn't inferior to the creator, if he is the creator, then his ability and wisdom is naturally not inferior to himself." Bao BuTong said: "Not true, not true. He's not inferior, but maybe he is superior. But how can his ability and wisdom be superior to himself?"

The carpenter pounded another ten times, the big stone slab was completely exposed. The zither elderly man gripped the iron ring and pulled it, but it did not move an inch, as he was about to channel his internal energy and give it another pull, the carpenter cried out in fear: "Elder brother, stop!" He jumped up and put the stone pestle on another mortar, he pulled down his pants and started urinating, he shouted: "Everyone, quickly come over, let us urinate together!" The elderly man was startled and quickly put down the iron ring, in a split second, the chessboard wielding man, bookworm, judge-pen wielding scholar, all of them went over and started urinating into the mortar.

GongYe Gan saw these five people urinate like mad, it was really funny and he could not refrain from laughing, but instantly, everyone caught a whiff of gunpowder. The carpenter said: "Enough, the danger is over!" The zither elderly man had a lot of urine, he kept on urinating non-stop, he mumbled to himself: "Damn it, damn it, I mess up another mechanism. Sixth Brother, luckily you spotted it quickly, else everyone would have been blown into meat pastes."

GongYe Gan trembled with fear, he became aware that he had just came back from the gates of hell, obviously a flint was linked to the iron ring, when the ring was pulled, the fuse was lighted and it advanced to the hidden explosive, fortunately the carpenter was extremely vigilant, everyone



urinated and they managed to wet the fuse and thus averted a big disaster.

The carpenter walked to the first stone mortar to the right, he exerted his strength and turned the mortar three times to the right, he raised his head towards the sky and recited something, after a long time, he turned the mortar six and a half times to the left. Suddenly, they heard another small squeaking sound, the big stone slab moved aside, revealing a hole. This time the zither elder dared not rush in, he waved his hands at the carpenter and signaled him to lead the way. The carpenter knelt down on the floor, he looked carefully at the first mortar to the left.

Suddenly they heard someone cursed from underground: "Old Freak of XingXiu, you evil bastard! Very good, very good! You finally found me, you're brilliant! You committed all sorts of crime, retribution will eventually come. Come, come! Come in and kill me!"

The bookworm, carpenter, opera actor and the rest all cheered in unison: "Fifth brother is alive!" The zither elder said loudly: "Fifth brother, we all arrived." The voice from underground was silent for a moment then it shouted: "It's really elder brother?", the tone was joyous.

There was a laughing sound and someone came out of the hole, it was the 'Enemy of King of Hell', Divine Physician Xue.

Surprisingly, other than the zither elder and the rest of his sworn brothers, there's also quite a few strangers, he cannot help but stare blankly, he said to XuanNan: "Great Master, you came out of your temple, these few people are your friends?"

XuanNan hesitated and then said: "Yes, they are all friends." Originally, Shaolin had maintained that Master XuanBei was killed by Gusu Murong family, they considered Murong family as their nemesis. This time, he came together with Deng BaiChuan to seek medical treatment, along the way Deng BaiChuan and GongYe Gan insisted that Master

XuanBei was not killed by their young master Murong, XuanNan was around seventy to eighty percent convinced, in addition they braved dangers together and collaborated towards a common goal, he finally treated them as friends. When GongYe Gan heard his words, he turned and nodded towards him.

Divine Physician Xue said: "Since we are all friends then it couldn't be much better, everyone please go underground, Master XuanNan please lead the way." Although he said those words, he still rushed ahead and led the way. The underground cellar was pitch-black, it's a very dangerous place to be in, the martial arts fraternity was full of deadly secrets and traps, no one trusted each other, thus to show respect for the visitors he has to personally lead the way and enter first.

As Divine Physician Xue entered the hole, XuanNan followed him and entered as well, everyone supported the injured and followed soon after, they even carried the corpse of XuanTong in. Divine Physician Xue operated a motor and the big stone slab moved and covered the hole, he operated the motor again and everyone heard a faint squeaking sound, the cassia tree moved back to its original position and covered the stone slab.

The interior was a stretch of stone steps, everyone has to stoop down to travel, after travelling for a while, the ceiling gradually got higher, they reached a natural tunnel. They travelled for around ten zhang and arrived at a spacious cavern. Over twenty people were seated by the corner beside a torch, the people consisted of male, female, young and old. When these people heard footsteps, they turned their head and looked at them.

Divine Physician Xue said: "These people are my family members, the current situation is urgent, I won't ask them to come over and pay their respects, please forgive my lack of manners. Big Brother, Second Brother, how did you come here?" He did not wait for their replies and immediately

started examining everyone's injuries. He examined XuanTong first, Divine Physician Xue said: "This great master achieved enlightenment and passed away, it is gratifying and joyous." He examined Deng BaiChuan, smiled and said: "My seventh sister's flower pollen will only make you drunk and intoxicated, there is no poison, he will wake up after a while." The middle-aged woman and opera actor suffered external injuries, although the injuries are not light but it's a small matter for Divine Physician Xue. He took Bao BuTong and Feng BoE pulse, closed his eyes and pondered deeply.

After a long time, Divine Physician Xue shook his head and said: "Strange, strange! Who injured these two people?" GongYe Gan said: "It's a weird looking youngster." Divine Physician Xue shook his head and said: "Youngster? This person's martial arts possess both extremes of good and evil, his internal energy is extremely profound, it has a least thirty years of cultivation, how can he be a youngster?" XuanNan said: "It certainly is a youngster, but his palm strength is deep and profound, my martial brother XuanTong clashed palms with him and also suffered this frost poison. His the disciple of Old Freak of XingXiu."

Divine Physician Xue was startled: "Even the disciple of Old Freak of XingXiu is this powerful? Amazing, amazing!" He shook his head and said: "Regrettable, regrettable, the frost poison of these two senior brothers, I am really powerless against it. From now on, I don't dare to be known as 'Divine Physician'."

Suddenly a bright resonant voice said: "Since this is the assessment of Divine Physician Xue, we will take our leave immediately." The voice came from Deng BaiChuan, he finally woke up after being intoxicated by the flower pollen, he heard Divine Physician Xue's diagnosis. Bao BuTong said: "That's right, that's right! Hide underground for what? Life and death is fated, how can we imitate tortoise and mole and hide in underground cavern?"

Divine Physician Xue laughed grimly: "You are extremely boastful! Do you know who is waiting outside?" Feng BoE said: "You all are scared of Old Freak of XingXiu, but I am not afraid. You all have superior martial arts but it's all in vain, you people get scared out of your wits when you hear the name of Old Freak of XingXiu." The zither elder said: "You are no match for me. Old Freak of XingXiu is my martial uncle, you tell me whether he's powerful or not?"

XuanNan changed the subject and said: "Old monk has things he don't understand, I wish to seek clarification." Divine Physician Xue said: "The eight of us are fellow apprentices, we are known as 'Eight Friends of HanGu'."

He pointed at the zither elder and said: "This is our elder brother, I am number five. The rest of the matters are really complicated and not easy to explain, moreover, it's useless to tell outsiders....."

Before he could finish, everyone suddenly heard a thin and soft voice calling: "Xue MuHua, why aren't you coming out to see me?"

The voice was thin yet balanced, it seemed to be faint and indistinct but everyone in the tunnel heard it clearly, the voice was like a long string, penetrating ten zhang through the ground and followed the complicated winding tunnel before entering the ear.

The zither elder was so surprised that he leaped up, he said in a trembling voice: "Old....Old Freak of XingXiu!" Feng BoE said loudly: "Big Brother, Second Brother, Third Brother, let us all go out and fight to the death with him." The zither elder said: "No you cannot do that, you must never do that. It doesn't matter if you go out and die a foolish death! But you will reveal this hiding place and the lives of all the people here will be sacrificed by your stupid bravery." Bao BuTong said: "His voice can penetrate this underground cave, won't he know we are hiding here? Even if you become a tortoise he will still force you out, you cannot hope to avoid him." The judge-pen wielding scholar and the

bookworm said: "He won't be able to enter this place for a while, everyone let us think of a good strategy to deal with him."

The carpenter kept silent throughout, at this moment he interrupted: "Although Martial Uncle Ding is highly skilled, but he will require at least four hours to break through this underground mechanism. He will need another four hours to think of a strategy to attack into this cave." The zither elder said: "Excellent! We have eight hours, we can consider carefully and take our time, correct?" The carpenter said: "Nine hours." The zither elder said: "Where did the extra one hour come from?" The carpenter said: "Within this eight hours I can arrange another three mechanisms, it can delay him for another hour."

The zither elder said: "Very good! Great Master XuanNan, when that big devil comes in at the scheduled time, we eight fellow apprentices will most probably not be able to escape his evil clutches. All of you are outsiders. The big devil will focus his attention on us martial nephews, all of you should be able to escape. You should not try to be a hero and fight to the death with him. Being able to escape the Old Freak of XingXiu is already considered to be a very heroic action."

Bao BuTong said: "You're farting, farting!" Everyone started sniffing but they did not detect any stench, they gazed questioningly at Bao BuTong. Bao BuTong pointed at the zither elder and said: "This person is bullshitting, it stinks so bad." Previously he was subdued by the zither elder in a single move, he felt resentment in his heart, although his frost poison had flare up at that time and he did not have any strength to resist, but he was well aware that his martial art was greatly inferior to his, the stronger his opponent, the more he wanted to curse.

The chessboard wielding man gave him one glance and said: "You can't even escape from my senior martial brother's palm, my martial uncle's martial art is ten times

better than his, now you tell me who is the one bullshitting here?" Bao BuTong said: "Not true, not true! Superior martial art is not related to bullshitting. If your martial art is high, you can't bullshit? If you don't bullshit, your martial art is high? Confucius doesn't know martial arts, maybe he specializes in bullshitting....."

Deng BaiChuan pondered: "The words of these people aren't unreasonable, third brother is just debating and joking around with them, we should not waste the time we have here." He interrupted: "Everyone, I did not know your origin and this led to numerous misunderstandings, I even accidentally injure this lady, I feel terribly apologetic. Since we met a common enemy today, we are one big family. Later when this powerful enemy comes in, although the subordinates of Young Master Murong are unworthy, we will never run away, if we can't resist him then we will simply just die together."

XuanNan said: "HuiFang, Xu Zhu, later on if both of you see the opportunity, you must try to escape and return back to Shaolin Temple to report this matter to the abbot. In the event that everyone is eliminated by that devil at least we can get crucial information delivered." Six Shaolin monks said in unison: "We respectfully obey your orders." Xue MuHua and Deng BaiChuan heard the speech by XuanNan, they knew his mind is set and everyone will live or die together, even though they now have another strong helper against the Old Freak of XingXiu they still did not feel confident in winning.

The zither elder was expressionless throughout, suddenly he clapped his hand and laughed: "Everyone is going to die today. Even if Martial Brother XuanKu did not die, he will not get the chance to hear my wonderful song, 'Humming of A Reed', why do I need to feel sad for his death? Alas! Alas! Someone told me that I, Kang GuangLing is a big idiot, I always refuse to accept. But now, it seems even if I am not a big idiot, I am still a small idiot."

Bao BuTong said: "You really are a genuine big idiot, big stupid fool!" The zither elder Kang GuangLing said: "I don't think I am more foolish than you!" Bao BuTong said: "You are ten times more foolish than me!" Kang GuangLing said: "You are hundred times more foolish than me!" Bao BuTong said: "You are thousand times more foolish than me!" Kang GuangLing said: "You are ten thousand times more foolish than me!" Bao BuTong said: "You are hundred thousand times more foolish than me, a million times, ten million times!"

Xue MuHua said: "You two are about the same, both of you are equally foolish. All the masters from Shaolin, when you safely return back to your temple your abbot will definitely ask about the cause and effect of this matter, I am afraid you won't be able to answer. This matter is a shameful incident in my sect, it's not related to outsiders. But to eliminate this scourge from the martial arts fraternity, we need the help of senior monks from Shaolin. Thus, I will now narrate in details the entire matter, but after hearing it please only report back to your abbot, do not leak or divulge it to another person."

HuiFang, Xu Zhu and the rest of the monks said in unison: "The words of Divine Physician Xue, junior monk will only report it to our abbot, we will never leak half a word to other people."

Xue MuHua said to Kang GuangLing: "Senior Martial Brother, I will now narrate the intermediate details of this affair."

Although Kang GuangLing was the most senior apprentice among the eight of them and his martial arts greatly exceeds his peers, but his personality was very childish and naive. Xue MuHua was only trying to preserve Kang GuangLing's status and prestige by asking him for permission in front of outsiders. Kang GuangLing said: "This is so strange, your mouth is your own, just say it if you like, why the need to ask me for permission?"

Xue MuHua said: "Great Master XuanNan, Master Deng, our master is known as Mr. Intelligent....."

XuanNan, Deng BaiChuan and the rest were all startled, they said in unison: "What? Mr. Intelligent is the Deaf Mute Old Man, this person is born deaf and mute, he adopted a nickname and called himself Mr. Intelligent. All his disciples and followers had their eardrums pierced and their tongue cut off, this fact is known by everyone. But Kang GuangLing and the rest of you are perfectly normal, this is extremely strange."

Xue MuHua said: "My master's disciples and followers are deaf and mute, but this is only for the past ten years. My master is not deaf, and he is certainly not mute, he was agitated by his younger martial brother the Old Freak of XingXiu Ding ChunQiu and became deaf and mute." XuanNan and the rest gave an 'Oh' sound. Xue MuHua continued: "My Grand-Master took in two disciples, the senior disciple is surname Su, named XingHe, naturally he's our Master, the second disciple is Ding ChunQiu. Their martial arts were originally on par with each other, but eventually, one of them became slightly better....."

Bao BuTong interrupted: "Haha, say no further, your martial uncle Ding ChunQiu must have surpassed your Master." Xue MuHua said: "You can't say that, my Grand-Master is a celestial being of knowledge, his skills all encompassing....." Bao BuTong said: "Not necessarily, not necessarily." Xue MuHua knew Bao BuTong like to argue for the sake of arguing, he ignored him and continued: "Originally, my Master and Ding ChuanQiu both focus solely on martial arts, but afterwards, my Master's attention was divided, he learnt music and zither from my Grand-Master....."

Bao BuTong pointed at Kang GuanLing and said: "Haha, your stupid zither skills must have been acquired from your Master."



Kang GuangLing glared at him and said: "Obviously my skills came from my Master, don't tell me it came from you?"

Xue MuHua said: "It's not much of a hindrance if my Master only learnt zither skills, but my Grand-Master's knowledge is simply too vast, zither, chess, calligraphy, painting, medicine, divination and astrology, arts and crafts, finance and commerce, plants and pottery, he knows everything, he mastered all of them. Originally, my Master only learnt zither skills, but soon after he started to learn chess, and then calligraphy, and then painting. Everyone please think for a moment, all these skills require painstaking effort and time, initially Ding ChunQiu pretended to be interested and tried to learn all these skills, but after ten to fifteen days, he claimed his aptitude is low and he's too stupid, it's difficult for him to learn, thus he focused solely on martial arts. After eight to ten years, their martial arts were at different levels."

XuanNan nodded his head repeatedly, he said: "Learning zither or chess alone would require half a lifetime of effort and energy, although Mr. Intelligent is smart and talented, it's difficult for him to undertake such tasks. Ding ChunQiu gave his undivided attention to martial arts, it's not surprising that his martial arts would eventually surpass his senior martial brother."

Kang GuangLing said: "Fifth brother, there is something even more important, why aren't you telling them? Quickly tell them."

Xue MuHua said: "Ding ChunQiu focus solely on martial arts, it should be a good thing, but.....but....sigh.....if I narrate this matter, it would be really shameful for our sect. Ding ChunQiu took advantage of the fact that he's younger than Grand-Master by twenty to thirty years, he's also handsome and elegant, unexpectedly, he seduced Grand-Master's lover. This matter really disgraced my Grand-Master, we were sympathetic and didn't say anything, we pretended to be deaf and mute. To cut the long story short, Ding ChunQiu

used various despicable tricks, he also mastered some extremely evil skills, Grand-Master tried to kill him in his fit of rage but Ding ChunQiu made the first move and managed to inflict serious injuries on my Grand-Master. Luckily, my Grand-Master possess peerless skills, although he was backstabbed, he managed to resist until my Master arrived to save him. My Master's martial arts were no match against that evil traitor, after a fierce battle my Master was injured and Grand-Master fell into deep ravine, his whereabouts unknown. My Master neglected his martial arts as he learnt various miscellaneous skills, but these miscellaneous skills were not completely useless. In the midst of danger, my Master deployed his eight divinatory trigrams and complex metaphysical art, Ding ChunQiu's sight and hearing was disturbed, both of them deadlocked in stalemate."

"Ding ChunQiu was unable to break through the formation or kill my Master, moreover, he knew there are quite a few divine skills in the sect and Grand-Master did not impart these skills to either disciples, he expected Grand-Master to pass on the manuals of these divine skills to my Master and he would slowly coerce my Master to hand them over. Thus, he made a pact with my Master, as long as my Master remains silent and not speak, he will not trouble him. At that time, my Master had the eight of us as his worthless disciples. My Master wrote a letter and expelled us, and from that point onwards he pretended to be deaf and mute, never speaking or hearing a word, his subsequent disciples and followers all had their eardrums pierced and tongues cut off, his sect became known as Deaf-Mute Sect. In my opinion, Master must have regretted getting distracted and learning all sorts of miscellaneous skills, his martial arts suffered and he fell short against Ding ChunQiu, thus he became deaf and mute so that he would never get distracted and learn those miscellaneous skills."

"The eight of us, other than learning martial arts, each one of us also picked up a unique miscellaneous skill. At that

time, Ding ChunQiu had yet to revolt, my Master had yet to understand the ill-effects of being distracted, thus he did not forbid us to learn the miscellaneous skills, he even encourage us and spent time to specially instruct us. Senior Martial Brother Kang GuangLing learnt zither from him.”

Bao BuTong said: “He only knows how to play zither to cows, nobody understands.”

Kang GuangLing was furious: “My zither skill is poor? Come, I will play it for you now.” And he took out his jade zither and placed it horizontally on his kneecaps.

Xue MuHua quickly held out his hand to stop him, he pointed at the chessboard wielding person and said: “This is my second brother Fan BaiLing, he learnt the game of Go (Chess), he’s one of the most skilled chess player around and rarely meets his match.”

Bao BuTong gave a glance at Fan BaiLing and said: “It’s not surprising that you use chessboard as your weapon, but the chessboard is made of magnetic metal, it trap and take away your opponent’s weapon, it’s a cheap trick, not the actions of upright gentleman.” Fan BaiLing said: “When playing chess, there are magnificent moments and orderly deployment of chess pieces, but there are also moments where you need to employ sly tactics and ambush.”

Xue MuHua said: “The chessboard of second brother Fan is made of magnetic metal, originally it’s for his research in chess. When he’s walking, sitting or sleeping, he will have sudden inspirations and he will set up his chessboard to try out the moves. Since the chessboard is made of magnetic metal, when he put the chess piece on it, even if he’s travelling on horse, the chess piece will never move or drop off. Afterwards, he found the chessboard to be quite convenient and hence made it as his weapon, the chess piece became his hidden projectile. He did not purposely make use of magnet to take advantage of his opponents.”

Although Bao BuTong was convinced, he still argued: “The reason is not justified, really not justified. Based on

second brother Fan skills, he can simply use a wooden chessboard and smack the metal chess piece onto the board to embed it, don't tell me the chess piece will still drop off?"

Xue MuHua said: "It's still not as convenient as using a metal chessboard. My third brother Gou, his name is Du, it represents his fondness in reading, the hundred schools of thought he read them all, he's an extremely knowledgeable scholar, I think everyone must have witnessed it."

Bao BuTong said: "He's just a lowly scholar, not worth mentioning." Gou Du was furious: "What? You call me a lowly scholar, don't tell me you are a noble scholar?" Bao BuTong said: "I don't deserve such praise, I don't deserve such praise."

Xue MuHua knew that if these two start debating, they won't stop even after three days and three nights, he quickly interrupted and changed the subject, he pointed at the judge-pen wielding scholar and said: "This is my fourth brother, he's an expert in painting, landscape or people, animals or flowers, he can draw them elaborately. His surname is Wu, before he came under the tutelage of our Master, he was a general of Great Song and led the army, thus everyone called him Wu LingJun"

Bao BuTong said: "I am afraid he led the army to its defeat, as for his paintings, you can't distinguish between human or ghost." Wu LingJun said: "If you ask me to describe your face, it's certainly hard to differentiate you from a ghost." Bao BuTong burst out into loud laughter: "Buddy if you have time, can you please draw my face as an example, a ghost picture, it will be really wonderful."

Xue MuHua laughed and said: "Brother Bao is handsome and elegant, why so modest? I am ranked number five, I learnt medicine and medical procedures, I have some minor reputation in the martial arts fraternity, I still remembered the martial arts taught by my Master."

Bao BuTong said: "You can barely treat common cough and cold, as for my frost poison, you can't do anything at all."

You can't treat any serious illness, anyone seeking treatment will just die. Hey hey, this title of 'Divine Physician', it surely is well deserved."

Kang GuangLing smoothen his long sleeves, his looks askance, he said: "Hey old chap your temper is really odd, you really stand out from the masses." Bao BuTong said: "Haha, my surname is Bao, named BuTong, naturally I stand out from the masses (pun on his name)." Kang GuangLing laughed heartily: "Your surname is really Bao? Named BuTong?" Bao BuTong said: "How can my name be fake? En, this old chap who specializes in making mechanism, you're skilled in construction and industrial arts, you must be under the tutelage of Mr. Lu Ban? (legendary Chinese craftsman)"

Xue MuHua said: "Exactly as you stated, Sixth Brother Feng ASan, before joining the sect, he's already a skilled carpenter, after entering into our Master's tutelage, he became even more skillful. Seventh Sister Shi is skilled in growing flowers, she has cultivated all sorts of exotic flowers and rare herbs, all of them flourishing."

Deng BaiChuan said: "The drug which made me dizzy, Miss Shi must have gotten them from flower pollens, not poison."

The pretty middle-aged woman was known as Shi QingFeng, she gave a faint smile: "I offended you just now, teacher Deng please forgive me." Deng BaiChuan said: "I am even more impertinent, I exerted too much strength and injure you, Miss please forgive me."

Xue MuHua pointed at the opera actor and said: "Eighth brother Li KuiLei, throughout his entire life he's addicted to acting opera, he's wild and unrestrained, as for martial arts, he inevitably neglected it due to his passion for opera. Alas, it's not only him, the eight of us all neglected our martial arts. The martial arts imparted by my Master, I will never be able to master it during my lifetime, but I was greedy and

went around to learn other people's unique moves, as a result.....sigh....."

Li KuiLei was lying down on the floor, he said: "I am lonely Emperor Li CunXu, I don't love my country but I love opera, sigh, well played, well played!"

Bao BuTong said: "I am lonely Emperor Li SiYuan, I overthrow and took over your country, I chop off your head."

Bookworm Gou Du interrupted: "Li CunXu was killed by his own subordinate Guo CongQian, he did not die by Li SiYuan's hands."

Bao BuTong is not familiar with such matters, he knew he definitely can't try to fake information and bluff Gou Du, he said: "Bah! So what if It's Guo CongQian, yawn, I am Qin ShiHuang, I burn the books and bury alive the Confucian scholars, I specializes in dealing with lowly scholars."

Xue MuHua said: "After the eight of us were expelled from the sect, we did not forget our Master's benevolence and instructions, we called ourselves 'Eight Friends of HanGu' to commemorate the times when Master imparted the skills to us at HanGu Pass. Outsiders only know we share vile habits....." Bao BuTong sniffed a few times with his nose, he said: "Very smelly, very smelly!" Gou Du said: "The Book of Changes says: [The unanimous opinion of people, it's as strong as the smell of orchid], the smell is sweet fragrance, old chap you really lack any knowledge." Bao BuTong said: "Your words are so fragrant that it smells like fart!"

Xue MuHua smiled and said: "No one knows that we came from the same sect and are fellow apprentices. To guard against the Old Freak of XingXiu when he returns to Central Plains, and to avoid letting him kill all of us in one fell swoop, we only meet once every two years, normally we scatter all over the world and live apart."

"Not long ago, Ding ChunQiu sent his disciple here, he ask me to treat a big belly monk. The one surnamed Xue has a weird temper, if someone wants medical treatment, he definitely have to ask me nicely, moreover the person who

came to seek treatment is a disciple of Old Freak Ding, naturally I don't want to treat. The person is unable to coerce me and left in rage. I knew Old Freak Ding will come sooner or later, thus, I feign my death and put deadly poison in the coffin, hoping that he will take the bait. My entire family, young and old, all hid in this underground cave."

Bao BuTong said: "You want someone to ask you nicely when requesting treatment, how is this weird? The one surnamed Bao also has a weird temper, if someone wants to treat my illness, he has to ask me nicely and not pressure or coerce me, else I will rather die of illness than let him treat it."

Kang GuangLing burst into loud laughter: "You think you are some kind of rare treasure? People provide you with treatment and they still have to plead you, unless.....unless....." and he couldn't think of the scenario.

Bao BuTong said: "Unless you are my son." Kang GuanLing was startled and thought the words were pretty true, if a father had a son who refuse to see a doctor, he has to beg and plead persistently. He's a reasonable person, but he didn't expect Bao BuTong to take advantage of him with wordplay, he said: "AiYa, I am not your son." Bao BuTong said: "Only your mother knows whether you're my son or not, how you know you're not?" Kang GuangLing was startled, he nodded his head and said: "Quite true." Bao BuTong laughed and thought: "This person is really a big idiot, this will just be a one-sided contest if I continue to take advantage of him."

Xue MuHua said: "There is too much coincidence, the eight of us are supposed to meet again after two years. My old servant mistook all of you as the enemy, the situation was urgent, he did not consult me and immediately set off the fireworks signal. The fireworks were made by my sixth brother, when set off, they illuminate the skies for several li, there are eight of us and each one has a unique firework signal. This matter is really fortunate and yet unfortunate,

the fortunate thing is that the 'Eight Friends of HanGu' can assemble in times of danger to resist the enemy together. But the unfortunate thing is that the Old Freak of XingXiu can solve his problem in one fell swoop and kill the eight of us."

Bao BuTong said: "Even though the Old Freak of XingXiu is highly skilled, he might not be superior to Master XuanNan from Shaolin. In addition, there is all of us the minor troops, we will shout loudly to show our power and do our utmost and fight with them, we might not lose. There's no need to be so.....so.....so..." as he said 'so' three times, his teeth started clattering with each other, his frost poison flared up and he can no longer talk.

Li KuiLei sang loudly: "I am Jing Ke who tried to assassinate Qin ShiHuang. Feng XiaoXiao contracted a cold, the brave warrior shivered and can't speak!" Suddenly a shadow of a human flew up and rammed head-first at Li KuiLei's chest. Li KuiLei cried out 'Ayo' and waved his arm to push the person away. The person grabbed onto him and they started fighting, the person is 'Gust of Wind' Feng BoE. Deng BaiChuan quickly said: "Fourth Brother, don't be rude!" and he extended his hands to pull Feng BoE away.

Deng Bai Chuan said: "Everyone is very frank, you did not cover the truth, you are certainly a true friend. We are facing a powerful enemy, we don't know if we will live or die, we Gusu Murong will also tell you everything we know. Previously, our Old Master Murong discussed something with us, he said the Grand-Master of Ding ChunQiu practiced a skill called [Eternal Youth Never Ageing Skill]. Old Master Murong told us, this eternal youth and never ageing is fake, everyone must die eventually. But with the correct cultivation of internal energy you can delay ageing, thirty to forty years old woman can appear as if she is eighteen to nineteen years old, fifty to sixty years old married woman can make their skin radiant and flesh supple, face snow-white and lips red, as if she is twenty to thirty years old. All



women wants to maintain their youthfulness, but aren't men the same? Ding ChunQiu did not kill your Grand-Master, most likely he's trying to coerce him to impart this set of eternal youth skill. Ding ChunQiu most probably tried to practice this skill but it's not very effective and he's slowly showing signs of ageing. If he knows his eternal youth skill is losing its effectiveness he will mostly like come to Suzhou and try to search for a book."

Gou Du said: "Look for a book? This is strange, he should come and ask me." Deng BaiChuan said: "Mr. Gou, although you are a scholar with great erudition, but the secrets to the eternal youth skill most probably can't be found in the books you read. Ding ChunQiu seduced your Grand-Master's lover, the two of them escaped to Suzhou and lived in seclusion in a village near Lake Tai. The large quantities of martial art manuals which they have stolen are also hidden at Suzhou."

XuanNan said: "If they want to look for a book, then simply let them look." Deng BaiChuan said: "We knew the ambition of Old Freak Ding is not small. If he purely wants to use that eternal youth skill to delay ageing, no matter how handsome he is we will simply not look at his sickening face. But I am afraid his real intention is to strengthen his [Great Energy Dissolving Skill]." XuanNan trembled with fear, he said: "I want to ask Divine Physician Xue, the [Great Energy Dissolving Skill], how exactly does it work? Everyone in martial arts fraternity all turn pale when they hear about the skill and they detest it bitterly."

Xue MuHua said: "It's rumored that this demonic skill requires a lot of venom fluid from poisonous snakes and bugs, this fluid will be absorbed into the palm, when fighting with an opponent, this deadly poison will be transferred to the other party. When we practice martial arts, out internal energy flow from the meridians channel, for example, the 'Guankang' acupoint is connected to the three yin meridian, the 'Dazhui' acupoint is connected to the three yang meridian of hand and feet, if these two acupoints come into

contact with poison, the internal energy within these meridians would seem to disappear without a trace. Ordinary people spread lies and claims that Ding ChunQiu can dissolve internal energy. But in my opinion, since the internal energy is already cultivated it cannot be dissolved, Old Freak Ding sends his deadly poison into his opponent's meridians channel and stop his opponent from exerting internal energy, the victim will assume that his internal energy is gone. It's the same logic as contracting normal poison, the poison will spread to the brain and the victim will feel numbness in his hand and feet, but it doesn't mean the muscle strength is dissolved. I invite Great Master to correct me if I am wrong."

XuanNan nodded his head and said: "Divine Physician is correct, you cleared all my doubts and suspicions."

At this moment, a thin slender voice transmitted into the cave: "Disciples of Su XingHe, quickly come out and surrender, maybe I can still spare your lives, if you still delay don't blame me for disregarding Sect relations."

Kang GuangLing was furious and cursed: "He's really shameless, still dare to talk about Sect relations."

Feng ASan said to Xue MuHua: "Fifth Brother, looking at the wood markings and stone quality, this cave is around for three hundred years, which skilled workman made it?" Xue MuHua said: "This property is passed down by my ancestors, it is passed on from generation to generation, it can be used for refuge in times of danger but I don't know who constructed it....."

He did not complete his sentence as a loud exploding sound was heard, it was like earthquake, everyone felt the ground swayed and vibrated, their footing unstable. Feng ASan expression turned pale, he said: "Not good! Old Freak Ding used explosives to forcibly blow open the entrance, he's going to attack soon!"

Kang GuangLing was furious: "Despicable to the extreme, shameless. Our Grand-Master and Master are skilled in

building and crafting, mechanism and traps were our Sect's specialty. Old Freak of XingXiu did not even invest effort to try and unravel the mechanism, he simply used explosives and blow everything to bits, how can he be considered a disciple of our Sect?" Bao BuTong shivered and said: "He killed his Master, injure his fellow martial brother, you still consider him as your martial uncle?" Kang GuangLing said: "This....."

Suddenly there was another loud explosion, the dust in the cavern flew about and irritated everyone's eyes. The cave was sealed off and does not allow air flow, after this explosion, draft of fresh air surged in, everyone felt their eardrum ached.

XuanNan said: "Rather than allow him to blow open this cave and attack in, we will be better off going out and attack him." Deng BaiChuan, GongYe Gan, Bao BuTong and Feng BoE all agreed in unison.

Fan BaiLing knew XuanNan was a senior eminent monk from Shaolin, asking him to hide in a cave to avoid the enemy was really a disgrace to the fame of Shaolin, since this battle was unavoidable he said: "If that's the case let us all go out together, we will risk our lives and fight that Old Freak."

Xue MuHua said: "Great Master XuanNan you don't have any enmity with this Old Freak, it's best that you don't get involve and stand aside and watch." XuanNan said: "Shaolin will interfere in all matters related to martial arts in Central Plains, you lot have to forgive me for interfering. Moreover, my martial brother XuanTong's death is due to the poison of the disciple of XingXiu, thus Shaolin has deep enmity with XingXiu Sect."

Feng ASan said: "Great Master is willing to help us, your sense of justice, we fellow apprentices are extremely grateful. Let us go out by the original path and surprise that Old Freak." Everyone nodded their heads and agreed.

Feng ASan said: "The family of fifth brother Xue, Mr. Bao and Mr. Feng can stay in this cave, I don't think the Old Freak will come in and search." Bao BuTong gave him a glance and said: "It's better that you stay here." Feng ASan quickly said: "I don't dare to look down on you two, but both of you carry serious injuries, it's not convenient for you to fight." Bao BuTong said: "The heavier the injury, when we start fighting the more energy we have!" Fan BaiLing and the rest all shook their heads, this person is really impervious to reason. Feng ASan operated the cave motor.

In the midst of operating the motor, three cannon fire rang out, 'Peng' 'Peng' 'Peng' they exploded and white smoke pervaded the area. After the cannon fire, the stone slab finally moved away, revealing a hole big enough for a person to pass, Feng ASan quickly crawled out.

Feng ASan had yet to stand up when a black figure emerged from the white smoke, the figure moved past him and rushed out towards a crowd of people outside and shouted: "Which one of you is Old Freak of XingXiu, the one surnamed Feng will fight with you." The person was 'Gust of Wind' Feng BoE.

He saw a man standing in front, he's wearing hemp clothes, Feng BoE shouted loudly: "Eat my fist!" 'Peng', his fist already hit the person's chest. The person was the ninth disciple of XingXiu Sect, his body swayed and Feng BoE's second fist hit him on his shoulder. Chopping and slapping sound rang out endlessly, Feng BoE executed his moves quickly, it seemed all his fists and palms landed on his opponent's body, but he's devoid of strength after contracting the poison, he could not topple the XingXiu disciple. XuanNan, Deng BaiChuan, Kang GuangLing and Xue MuHua all came out of the cave.

They saw a tall and big old man standing at the southwest corner, to his left and right were one short man and one tall man, the iron-head man was one of them. Kang

GuangLing shouted: "Old Traitor Ding, you still not dead yet? Remember me?"

The tall and big old man was the Old Freak of XingXiu Ding ChunQiu. When he captured HuiJing he wanted to force him to look for the frost silkworm, but he found that the monk was extremely sick, he quickly searched for Xue MuHua to ask him to provide treatment. Xue MuHua tried to fake death but he eventually still can't escape Ding ChunQiu. Ding ChunQiu gave a quick glance and recognized all his opponents, he waved his feathered fan and said: "Nephew MuHua, if you can cure that fat Shaolin monk, I will spare your life, but you have to take me as your Master and join XingXiu Sect." Originally he wanted Xue MuHua to just cure monk HuiJing and he will bring them to Kunlun Mountain to catch the frost silkworm, but afterwards he wanted to recruit Xue MuHua so that both of them can research the secrets to the [Eternal Youth Never Ageing Skill].

Xue MuHua listened to his tone and expression, Ding ChunQiu disregarded all the opponents before him, he seemed confident of controlling everyone's life and death and does as he pleases. Xue MuHua knew his martial uncle was very powerful, he felt really scared, he said: "Old Traitor Ding, I only listen to the orders of one person, whoever he ask me to treat I will do it, it's easy for you to kill me, but to treat someone, you will have to go beg that person."

Ding ChunQiu said coldly: "You only listen to orders from Su XingHe correct?"

Xue MuHua said: "Only scoundrels who are worse than beast will dare to deceive and exterminate their Master." As he said this, Kang GuangLing, Fan BaiLing and Li KuiLei all cheered.

Ding ChunQiu said: "Very good, all of you are obedient disciples of Su XingHe, but Su XingHe already sent someone to inform me that he had long expelled the eight of you, you people are no longer his disciples. Don't me tell that one

surnamed Su lied and secretly maintained this Master and disciple relationship?"

Fan BaiLing said: "Master for a day, father for an entire life. Master did expel the eight of us. All these years we never saw him at all, when we dropped by to pay our respects he refused to see us. But our love and respect for our Master has never decreased at all. The one surnamed Ding, you are the reason why the eight of us became lonely souls and wandering ghosts, with no Sect to depend on."

Ding ChunQiu smiled and said: "Your words are quite true. Su XingHe was afraid that I would kill all of you. He expelled the eight of you to preserve your insignificant lives. He's not willing to pierce your eardrum or cut off your tongue, he really has deep feelings for you people, humph, what great things can he achieve by being so indecisive and fainthearted? Hey, very good, all of you tell me, you still consider Su XingHe as your Master?"

When Kang GuangLing and the rest heard his words, they knew that if they claim that they were still 'Disciples of Su XingHe', Ding ChunQiu will immediately kill them, but the relationship between Master and disciple was deep, how can they be cowardly and betray their Master, out of the eight, only Shi QingFeng was seriously injured and has to stay behind in the cave, the seven of them shouted in unison: "Although we are expelled, but the relationship between Master and disciple is eternal and will never change."

Li KuiLei suddenly shouted: "I am the mother of Old Freak of XingXiu, I had an affair with the dog of ErLang Shen and gave birth to this little bastard. I will break your dog leg!" He imitated the accent of an old lady and then he barked three times like a dog.

Kang GuangLing, Bao BuTong and the rest all laughed wildly.

Ding ChunQiu was in a towering rage, his eyes gave a peculiar radiance, he flicked his left sleeve, a stream of oily green flame shot towards Li KuiLei, it's even faster than a

shooting star. Li KuiLei already suffered a broken leg, he's holding onto a wooden crutch and can't move freely, he wanted to dodge the flame but how can he do it in time, there was a 'Chi' sound and his clothes ignited. He quickly laid on the ground and rolled, but as he rolled the flame became even more fierce. Fan BaiLing quickly grabbed some mud off the ground and sprayed it on his body.

Meteor-flame shot out from Ding ChunQiu's sleeves in quick succession, it went towards Kang GuangLing and the other four, only Xue MuHua was spared. Kang GuangLing pushed out with both palms and shocked the flame away. XuanNan waved both his palms and cleaved two flames. But Feng ASan and Fan BaiLing got hit and their clothes ignited. Immediately, the two of them along with Li KuiLei got burnt and cried out in pain.

The numerous disciples of Ding ChunQiu praised: "Master only displays his little trick and you all turn into roasted pigs, quickly surrender now!"

"Master has the ability to shift the heaven and split the ground, no one has ever done it before him and no one will be able to replicate it in the future, you all pigs and dogs really get to see the power of XingXiu Sect today."

"Master triumph in every battle and win every fight, he's the hero of ancient and modern times, be swept away by his might and power!"

Bao BuTong shouted loudly: "Bullshit! Bullshit! Aiyo, this is so corny! Old Thief Ding, you are really thick-skinned!"

Bao BuTong just barely finished speaking when two meteor-flame swiftly came at him. Deng BaiChuan and GongYe Gan both sent out a palm and deflected the flames, but both of them felt as if a giant hammer smashed their chests, they groaned and quickly, took three steps back. Ding ChunQiu used his powerful internal energy to send out the meteor-flame, XuanNan and Kang GuangLing have high internal energy and they did not suffer any injury when they

deflected the flame, Deng BaiChuan and GongYe Gan are not at the same level and they could not withstand it.

XuanNan moved towards Li KueiLei and waved his palm, the palm force brushed across his body, there was a 'Chi' sound and his clothes were ripped apart by the palm force, large portion of clothes tore off, the remaining flames that continue to burn were extinguished by the palm wind.

A disciple of XingXiu Sect called out: "The palm force of this bald donkey is not too weak, it's around ten percent of my Master's level." Another disciple said: "Pei, it's only around one percent!"

XuanNan send out another two palms and extinguished the flame on Fan BaiLing and Feng ASan, at this moment, Deng BaiChuan, GongYe Gan, Kang GuangLing and the rest had thrown themselves into the crowd and attacked the disciples of XingXiu Sect.

Ding ChunQiu stroke his long beard and said: "Senior monk from Shaolin is indeed extraordinary, little brother will ask you for advice today." As he finished speaking he took a step forward, his left palm floated lightly towards XuanNan. He considered himself to be a young man, he did not call himself 'old man' but 'little brother'.

XuanNan knew Old Freak Ding has deadly poison covering his entire body, he's also proficient in [Great Energy Dissolving Skill], thus he dared not be complacent, both his palms danced about, immediately he send out eighteen palm strikes at Ding ChunQiu, this eighteen palm strikes came out consecutively in a chain, his left palm has yet to withdraw but his right palm already struck out, it's incomparably fast, he did not give Ding ChunQiu any time to use his poison. This was Shaolin's [Quick Palm], it was indeed strong and formidable as Ding ChunQiu was forced to retreat continuously, XuanNan send out eighteen palms and Ding ChunQiu retreated eighteen steps. After completing eighteen palm strikes, both his legs flew up consecutively in a chain, it's incomparably fast and he kicked out thirty six



times, the shadow of his leg flashed, nobody can tell whether he kicked out with his left or right leg. Ding ChunQiu moved his body and quickly sidestepped, he avoided the thirty six kicks, but he heard two slapping sounds, his shoulder was hit by two fists, it seemed when XuanNan was on his last two kicks he send out both his fists. Ding ChunQiu avoided the kicks but he can't avoid the fists. Ding ChunQiu said: "Very powerful!", his body swayed two times.

But XuanNan felt a burst of dizziness, immediately he felt distracted and empty. He knew his situation was not good, Ding ChunQiu's clothes was covered with deadly poison, when his fists hit Ding ChunQiu's shoulder he contracted the poison, at once he exhaled his breath, the air within his body circulated and he send out his left fist at Ding ChunQiu.

Ding ChunQiu waved his right fist to block the incoming fist, immediately after, he violently struck out with his left fist. After contracting the poison, XuanNan could not turn his body effectively, it's difficult for him to dodge the attack, he can only stick out his right fist to counter the force. In this situation, they were competing their inner strength, XuanNan was secretly alarmed: "I cannot compete internal energy with him!" but if he does not exert any internal energy, his opponent's energy would come crashing in and his inner organ would immediately shatter, he knew he had fallen into a trap, but there was no other choice and he channeled his internal energy to resist. As he channeled his internal energy, he felt his energy scattered and disappeared into thin air, he could not gather his internal energy, as he heard the explanation from Xue MuHua before he knew his meridian was poisoned.

Ding ChunQiu laughed out loudly, he shrugged his shoulder, there was a slapping sound and XuanNan collapsed onto the ground.

After beating XuanNan, Ding ChunQiu surveyed his surroundings, GongYe Gan and Fan BaiLing had collapsed and they kept shivering, they were beaten by You TanZhi's frost poison palm, Deng BaiChuan, Xue MuHua and the rest were still fighting fiercely with his disciples, from his XingXiu Sect he had around seven disciples either dead or injured.

Ding ChunQiu gave a long laugh, his big sleeves fluttered in the air and he pounced towards the back of Deng BaiChuan and send one palm at him, he turned around and gave a kick, Bao BuTong collapsed from the kick. Deng BaiChuan send out his palm to meet his opponent's palm, immediately he felt his chest was empty, as he was about to inhale and concentrate, Ding ChunQiu send another palm at him. Deng ChunQiu can only grudgingly send out another palm to meet him, he felt a slight cooling sensation on his palm, his entire body felt soft and devoid of strength, he was in a daze and all he saw was white fog. A XingXiu disciple came over and bumped Deng BaiChuan with his arm, Deng BaiChuan collapsed onto the ground.

In a short period of time, all the subordinates of Murong family, XuanNan and the rest of the Shaolin monks, Kang GuangLing and the rest of 'Eight Friends of HanGu', all of them were defeated by Ding ChunQiu and You TanZhi. You TanZhi had extremely deep and profound internal energy, but his martial art was mediocre and weak, under a few days of guidance under Ding ChunQiu he learnt seven to eight palm moves, although his martial art was still weak compared to common fighters, but along with the frost poison accumulated in his body, his power was formidable and extraordinary. When GongYe Gan attacked You TanZhi with his palm, he hit him on the first strike, but he got counter-attacked by the frost poison and ended up injured.

The only person who did not sustain any injury was Xue MuHua, he attacked numerous times but the XingXiu disciples only sniggered and ran away from him, they did not fight back at all.

Ding ChunQiu smile and said: "Nephew Xue, your martial arts are much higher than your fellow apprentices, amazing!"

Xue MuHua saw his fellow martial brothers collapsing one by one, only he was left unscathed, obviously Ding ChunQiu was being lenient and let him off. He gave a long sigh and said: "Old Traitor Ding, the external injuries of that fat monk is easy to treat but his internal injuries is difficult, he can't live for more than a few days, you want to force me to cure him, dream on!"

Ding ChunQiu waved his hand and beckoned him: "Nephew Xue, come over here!"

Xue MuHua said: "Kill me if you want, I won't listen to what you say."

Li KuiLei shouted: "Fifth Brother Xue's devotion to righteousness inspires reverence, you are Su Wu, exiled for nineteen years and remained loyal to the Han."

Ding ChunQiu gave a slight smile, he stood three steps away from Xue MuHua, lightly resting his left palm on his shoulder, he smiled and asked: "Nephew Xue, how long have you been learning martial arts?" Xue MuHua said: "Forty five years." Ding ChunQiu said: "Practicing day and night for forty five years, it's really not easy. I heard you provide medical treatment in exchange for martial arts, you must have learnt numerous exquisite moves from various school and sect, correct?" Xue MuHua said: "I learn all these moves to kill you, but....but no matter how exquisite it is, it's completely useless against your sorcery.....alas!" He shook his head and gave a deep sigh.

Ding ChunQiu said: "Not necessarily! Internal energy is the root, martial art moves is the branch and leaf, if the root is solid and strong the branch and leaf will naturally flourish, it doesn't mean martial moves are useless. If you join my sect, I can impart you matchless internal energy cultivation method, afterwards it is easy for you to dominate Central Plains."

Xue MuHua was furious: "I have my own Master, you ask Xue MuHua to join your sect, I would rather bang my head and die!"

Ding ChunQiu smiled and said: "You need energy and strength to bang your head till death. If you lose all your internal energy, you will have difficulty walking, why the need to talk about banging your head? Forty five years of hard work, hei hei, what a pity, what a pity."

Sweat streamed down endlessly from his forehead when he heard this, Xue MuHua felt the hand on his shoulder gradually warmed up, Ding ChunQiu only need to will it and his [Great Energy Dissolving Skill] would come forth, forty five years of hard work would immediately vanish and disappear without a trace, he clenched his teeth and said: "You are heartless enough to kill your own Master, martial brother and now the eight of us, do you even care? It's a pity if I lose forty five years of hard work, but I will die anyway, why do I care about hard work or not?"

Bao BuTong cheered: "Well said, you have moral backbone and integrity. Does XingXiu sect have such a hero?"

Ding ChunQiu said: "Nephew Xue, I won't kill you now, but I will ask you eight times: 'Will you treat that fat monk?', if you reply that you won't treat, I will kill your senior elder brother Kang GuangLing. The second time you reply that you won't treat, I will kill your second brother Fan BaiLing. Your martial sister, the one that knows how to cultivate flowers, where is she hiding? I will eventually find her. The sixth time you reply that you won't treat, I will kill that pretty martial sister of yours. The seventh time, I will kill your eighth brother Li KuiLei. If I ask the eighth time and you still refuse to treat, make a guess, who will I kill?"

Xue MuHua heard him narrate his ruthless method, he turned pale and trembled: "At that time you will kill me, no big deal. All eight of us will just die together."

Ding ChunQiu smiled and said: "There is no hurry to kill you, the eighth time you reply that you won't treat, I will go kill 'Mr. Intelligent' Su XingHe." Xue MuHua shouted loudly: "Old Traitor Ding, don't you dare touch a single hair on my Master!"

Ding ChunQiu smiled and said: "Why not? The Divine Elder of XingXiu always operate alone, the words I said today, I might forget them tomorrow, although I had an agreement with Su XingHe as long as he remain mute I won't kill him. But you dare offend me and make me angry, the mistakes made by a disciple would naturally be borne by the Master, I like to kill him, who can stop me?"

Xue MuHua's mind was in a mess, he knew this old traitor was coercing him to treat Huijing, his purpose must be very sinister, if he agree to treat he would be aiding a tyrant, but if he refuse to treat, the lives of his fellow martial brothers and sister would be lost, even their master Mr. Intelligent would die for sure. He muttered to himself for a long time and finally said: "Fine, I will yield, but after treating that fat monk you must not trouble all my friends, martial brothers and sister and my Master."

Ding ChunQiu was overjoyed, he quickly said: "Sure, sure! I promise to spare their dog lives."

Deng BaiChuan said: "The honorable gentleman fell into the evil scheme of a treacherous villain, he deserves to die, who needs you to show mercy?" Originally his voice was strong and bright, but his internal energy had dissipated, although he's indignant, his voice inevitably became breathless and devoid of strength. Bao BuTong shouted: "Xue MuHua, don't fall into his trap, this swindler admit it himself, his words cannot be trusted."

Xue MuHua said: "Correct, you said it before: 'the words I said today, I might forget them tomorrow'."

Ding ChunQiu said: "Nephew Xue, my first question is: 'Will you treat that fat monk?'" As he finished speaking he extended his right leg and targeted the temple of Kang

GuangLing, obviously if Xue MuHua reply 'won't treat' he would immediately strike out and kill Kang GuangLing. Everyone felt their heart thumping around madly, suddenly someone shouted: "Won't treat!"

The one that shouted 'won't treat' was not Xue MuHua, but Kang GuangLing.

Ding ChunQiu sneered: "You want me to kick out and end your life, not so easy." He turned towards Xue MuHua and asked: "Do you want to act as my proxy and kill your own senior martial brother?"

Xue MuHua sighed and said: "Forget it! Forget it! I promise to treat that fat monk."

Kang GuangLing cursed: "Fifth Brother Xue, how can you be so useless. This Old Traitor Ding is the enemy of our Sect, how can you be so cowardly and afraid of death, you actually yield to his threats?"

Xue MuHua said: "It's no big deal if he kills the eight of us! But didn't you listen, this old traitor wants to trouble our master!"

When they thought about the safety of their master, Kang GuangLing and the rest became speechless.

Bao BuTong said: "Co.....", he wanted to scold 'Coward', but before he can finish Deng BaiChuan extended his hand and covered his mouth. Bao BuTong revered this elder brother, he yield to him fifty percent of the time, thus he endured his anger and swallowed his words.

Xue MuHua said: "The one surname Ding, since I yielded to you and agreed to treat that monk, you have to be polite to my friends here." Ding ChunQiu said: "I will comply with everything you say."

Immediately Ding ChunQiu ordered his disciples to carry Huijing over. Xue MuHua asked Huijing: "You interacted with an extremely powerful poison object for long period of time, thus the frost poison penetrated deep into your inner organs, what is that poison object?" Huijing said: "It's the frost silkworm from Kunlun Mountain." Xue MuHua shook his

head and did not probe further, he carried out acupuncture and moxibustion, he also took out two crimson pills and fed it to him, afterward he treated the rest of the people, mended their bones and treated their injuries, this went on until dawn and finally everyone got treated, the injured lay on beds or wooden door boards. The family members of Xue MuHua came out and made noodles for everyone to eat.

Ding ChunQiu ate two bowls of noodles, he smiled at Xue MuHua and said: "You really adapt well to circumstances, you didn't poison the noodles." Xue MuHua said: "Speaking of poison, there is no one better than you. Although I have the intention but I dare not display my lowly skills in front of an expert."

Ding ChunQiu laughed out loudly and said: "Ask your family members to go out and hire ten donkey carriages." Xue MuHua said: "You need ten donkey carriages for what?" Ding ChunQiu rolled his eyes and said coldly: "Do I need to inform you of my own business? Divine Physician Xue must be quite popular with the residents here, it won't be difficult to hire ten donkey carriages." Xue MuHua was helpless and could only order his family members to go out and hire the carriages.

It was afternoon when the ten donkey carriages arrived. Ding ChunQiu said: "Kill all the carriage drivers!" Xue MuHua was shocked and said: "What?" but he saw the palms of the disciples of XingXiu flying around, a few slapping sound and the ten dead bodies of the drivers lay on the ground. Xue MuHua was furious: "Old Traitor Ding! How did the drivers offend you? You.....you.....go so far as to kill them?"

Ding ChunQiu said: "My XingXiu Sect wants to kill a few people, why the need to discuss about right or wrong, reason or justification? All of you enter the carriages now, no one stays behind! Nephew Xue, if you have any medical books or drugs bring them along with you, I am going to burn down your house."

Xue MuHua had another huge shock, but this person commits all sorts of evil misdeeds imaginable, it's a waste of time to debate with him, he had thoroughly memorized all the medical books, but all those pills, ointments and pellets that he painstakingly concocted, he cursed endlessly and started gathering the medical herbs and drugs. He have yet to finish packing when the XingXiu disciples set fire at the back of his house.

Shaolin monk HuiFang originally received order from XuanNan, he has to escape and deliver news to Shaolin Temple, but Ding ChunQiu was strict and kept a tight surveillance, he did not escape far and eventually got captured back. XuanNan and Six Monks from Shaolin, the four subordinates from Gusu Murong family, Eight Friends of HanGu, except for Xue MuHua all of them were injured, some had their internal energy sealed or injured by Ding ChunQiu's palm, some got hit by You TanZhi's frost poison and the rest got hit by deadly poison from XingXiu disciples, all of them were unable to move a single step. In addition, the family members of Xue MuHua were brought along as well and packed into the ten carriages. Some of the XingXiu disciples became carriage drivers, some escorted the carriage, the curtains in the carriage were pulled down and tied with ropes, there was no light at all in the carriage and they could not see the outside view.

XuanNan and the rest had the same question: "This old traitor, where is he bringing us to?" They knew that if they start inquiring they would get insulted and humiliated by the XingXiu disciples, they definitely won't get any answer, they thought it in their heart: "We can only be patient for now, we will know when the time comes."